Sulfur 37

POETRY BY ANNE WALDMAN, ANTONIN ARTAUD, JEROME ROTHENBERG, PETER REDGROVE, LUISA FUTORANSKY

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A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: TRIPLE MASK by Michel Nedjar (fabric, glue, dye—34 x 32 x 26 cm, 1980/1982), courtesy of Galerie Susanne Zander, Köln, Germany

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

MILTON KESSLER

SCALES

The prairie is more roiling higher

and plains
flat wheat and bison.

This double harp inside your heart
striving

for the shaking.

Two diesels pull, three diesels push,
catheter-red gondolas
into mountain
chimney.

Out of the maze we punch out
our cartouche
onto frozen mud.
Plain, ornate, it's mated-maze made.

Ladder, I earned my back today.
Ladder, I earned my chains today.
Ladder, I earned my bed.

The child runs fast from great grand
mother who can't catch up

but it stops.

Dieto cracked his hirpled leg
to die
posing as a flower pausing.

"I was a cross-handed hitter, kid,

strong
to the opposite field."

How, Bertha said,
can I make you happy?
I don't have any money.

Now the hollow basswood's down.
If we live through winter, wife,
Oh let us
grant thy garden.

Mao, dementate, "Pupils obey!
Bring
two dead sparrows
to school a day."

Last bed should be a beach
your great grandchild waits

so two can reach.

Cinders and sparklers
on sills and rails.
A nightshift ferry seething into its birth.
Cablights frame avenue, street, rain.

Over own open baritone jaws near
saw Ralph Vaughn Williams ear
Golden City premier.

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ANNE WALDMAN

LACRIMARE, LACRIMATUS

"dux femina facti"

Publius Vergilius Maro (70–19 B.C.E.) continues to be interesting referee or reference point & aspect for the arguments of the poem. Which built upon continues the discussion of what is appropriate "stuff" for epic attention. War, gender, language? This has become the poet's mantra. Virgil is farmer boy, didactic on issues of crop-raising, beekeeping, cattle raising. O holy earth poet-man! He was a cultivator of lines. Also the not-so-great-as Homer sophisticate Latin poet, stealing fire from his Greek models. In her heart Catullus is perhaps the greater magician, but she is impressed by any long-winded scop's scope. Why? It furthers the plan to "include it all" (Gertrude Stein's admonition) and history. And her story of a generation & all the consociate-aspirational activities associated with it. It's a smaller planet than last year's. Another President is dead. But her "time" is filtered through one particular suspect antenna, one welcoming receiver. Do it differently! tell the story of the tribe! and she feels some of her male kin get used to it. And what of Sulpicia, (circa 55-19 B.C.E.), said to be educated & beautiful? What happened to all her poems? A scant six remain, conversational & witty, first complaining of spending her birthday in "the disgusting country" à la Frank O'Hara without her boyfriend, then delighted when she'll have her birthday in Rome after all. Quite a contrast to hero Aeneas—truer folk-leader—who submits his private need to the need of his people and becomes ultimate sacrificing warrior Patriarch. Dido is tragic, long-suffering suicidess of womanly passion & down-under despair. Wants to drag the rest of it down with her. Can we let Aeneas off the hook? Is he culpable. We travel to the underworld. The net. The drag. This poet wants to get inside Latin tongue to further examine love & military glory. She thus titles this aspect of the journey: Lacrimare, Lacrimatus, of the travails of weeping. Much currently to cry about. "Cry like a baby" the songs say. Virgil loves Italy, its landscape. What is the relation of language to landscape? How is one masculine or feminine? Heinrich Heine spoke of Latin language as one "for military commands, governmental reports,

usurers' judgments, a lapidary speech for the flinty Roman folk." Another strand: Shakespeare's sense of Roman valor & virtue enters in in the hint of Coriolanus, whose mother Volumnia haunts the essence of her son's valor. It appears no one wins in war. Do we continue to conduct wars, more & more nationalistic, because we kept the myths alive in our various languages. And wars against the landscape? Against Nature? And now we turn on our own citizens? Latin seems particularly relevant as a kind of conquering tongue, obsolete in most places now for most school children. She suggests the popular experiment of the poets: try to eradicate all Latin from your speech, from your text, a haughty challenge and German will be your new/old tongue. She has interesting consociate-correspondent in one William Sterling, who lives at Goat-in-the-Road on the Pacific coast, an Attorney-at-Law, who is a passionate classicist and translates some of her phrases into a just Latin to sound & ponder. She is grateful for the call & response he provides. Richard Milhouse Nixon, who resigned the American presidency in scandal enters the poem on his death. His reign was shrouded in many dark veils. He was complex villain and emblem of paranoia. Did he really *need* to be loved? Her eye alights on the descriptions of the efforts of the "mani pulite" (clean hands) crusade in Milano, attempting to expose the corruptions of Berlusconi & his Fininvest Empire. Do the shades still murmur & writhe in Dante's hell.

.....and this will be in part in partial Latin, in art of Latin

strum
a ton
a rung
of sung stuff
or rapt-spun
  strung out
hummed into being
                un-jam thy string awhile

Dear Anne: What civilizes? Is that at least part of the root query that throws the branching questions in your introductory paragraph? How do civilizing influences work? Ignore for the time being questions about the premise itself: what does one mean by "civilizing"? Can civilizing occur in the absence of language? No, I dare say. So how does language serve to civilize or decivilize? I worked for a Swiss economics professor once, a bit of a polymath he was, who argues tenaciously that war is the mother of invention and therefore the grandmother of civilization. Does this reduce

to the proposition that we need war in order to beget peace? Is this a necessary dialectic, either biologically or intellectually? Does that make the poet the apostle of belligerence? Presumably not. But the presumption does not answer the challenge: how does language work or serve for better or worse?

Perhaps these concerns are more germane to the **Odyssey** than to the **Aeneid**. What do you think? Or is the difference simply one of scale, not of theme? With the **Odyssey** Homer considers the redomestication of a soldier and the restoration of a household. With the **Aeneid** Virgil considers the foundation of a state and the declaration of its psycho-emotional constitution. Same theme, just small screen vs. big screen?

I have some teaching notions I would like to run before you. For example, if the leading character of the **Odyssey** were female, not male, what would the epithet for her be in the first line of Book One?

(sing in me Musa & spell the story):
Comminius speaks:

I shall lack voice; the deeds of Coriolanus
Likewise the dirty deeds of Richard M. Nixon
Should not be uttered feebly. It is held
That valor is the chiefest virtue
virtus famula fortuna est
and
Most dignifies the haver
But was that what Nixon had?

valor, virum, virtus
he never had

whatever resides here,
whatever had
gone mute—
rift with—
a kind of forgone pride,
twilled,
then twisted tongue
or
manhood, she could say—the poet could say—

with smugness
herself defined as defender of peace
=she rages=

pax on this or any other turf
how many Americans slaughtered as he
kept going the war
how many Vietnamese, Cambodians

bodes not well the warring god realm
&now
the presidents & ministers confer on Bosnia
statesmen are encumbered
stratagems, fisted
oblique for the asking
how meet?

at divisae sunt factiones
et singulariter insaburratae

---

but divided are the parties
& singularly unballasted

Anne: I took "singularly" in the denotative case "one by one, each severally," which is precisely what **singulariter** indicates, not in the looser, intensifying sense of "very, exceptionally"

The crucial adjective "unballasted" is a challenge.
In the context of the poem I take it nautically, an allusion to the want of able helmsmen in the ship of state. A ship without ballast, and without a cargo to compensate for the absence of ballast, floats high and is tippy. Hence my choice of **instabiles**.

Instabilis can certainly be said of a ship. The historian Q. Curtius Rufus wrote of **naves instabiles**. But insofar as **instabiles** is recognized and registered as "unstable," and the notion of instability seizes the reader's mind, the ship of state metaphor gets lost in the briny froth of latent linguistic associations. The original metaphor itself is then unballasted.

The Roman word for "ballast," I learn, is **saburra**, the primary sense of which is "sand," the principal material used for ballasting. I thought of **onus**, meaning "burden" in its most general sense, but also meaning cargo in maritime contexts. The related verbs are **saburrare** and **onerare**; the participles, correctly inflected to agree with **factiones**, are **saburratae** and **oneratae**. I find no evidence in my Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary of negative compounds in the forms **insaburratae** and **inoneratae**. The classical formation would probably be achieved with **non**: thus **non saburratae** and **non oneratae**, though the compounds with **in-** would have been intelligible if not conventional or elegant. But what rule (other than your wish in this regard, which I shall honor and obey without deviation) requires strict adherence to what we moderns imagine the ancients would have done?

So perhaps, in favor of preserving the ballast metaphor literally, you might prefer this:

at divisae sunt factiones
et singulariter insaburratae

In this version do you hear a light auditory echo of the sounds of "scurrilous"?

---

a people unallowed to bare arms
lift, o lift ill fitted embargo
scourge, torrefy, *vidimus*

It is not a united mission
distracted
what are the deals to cut
with commanders
obsessed with their mission of cleansing
for the ongoing cutting of deals?
(& 20,000 women raped, you hear?)

dealt with, you could say,
a blow to—you could say—
they—the others—
compared to Ottoman Turks
were dealt a bad hand,

& think influences here
the way you weave
    or spit
what you might don as
marriage is but funeral weeds

I was 7 I was 17 longing for a peace offering to be given I was 27
longing I was 47

& strum
& strum
strum a lift
a pax

across a bridge
divided children could be seen to run
newspaper circa 1994

Question: what is a world when you wipe out another ethnic
[group?
Answer: tomb, forgotten, clean slate
Question: will thrive will prosper?
Answer: with blood in the sky, on hands, on earth, on street,
[Mad Tom

but they say traces at Auschwitz drag up nay nuncle
yet not a scream remains
while they rent torture chambers to tourists in Plague
short on space
wherein tortured fell apart, stretched, racked, scoriated with pain
to eke out confusion, testing loyalties, manhood

& you do scream Aeeeeeeya

. . .his pupil age

Man-ent'red thus, he waxed like the sea;
And in the brunt of seventeen battles since,

He lurched ail swords of the garland.

His sword, death's stamp,
Where it did mark, it took;
    from face to foot
He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
Was timed with dying cries
who's gone before

& there are meetings, at a metaphorical table. . .
E Mail?
public space?

(across my lines)

On Feb. 16, 1993 in St. Louis, Missouri, a Skinhead biker beat a black man to death

On Feb. 19, 1993, a Skinhead was arrested in connection with the beating death of a homeless man in Birmingham, Alabama

On May 20, 1993, in Montreal, Canada, a Skinhead beat to death a jogger he believed was gay

On June 3, 1993, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, a Skinhead shot and killed a white youth and injured the black friend he was walking with

On July 20, 1993, in Tacoma, Washington, the NAACP headquarters was firebombed. Church-of-the-Creator Skinheads have been charged with this crime

On July 23, 1993, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, a Skinhead beat a 75-year-old black man to death with his own cane

tears of the women of the gay men & women of the black men & women of the black gay men & women of the white men & women of the white gay men & women

tears of the children
karma of divisiveness

set down a load
right noble?
ineffective
valor turns to rancor
    as they file past a casket
                culture sentimental & sick with death
                re-habilitation
                langue d'oc apart
                or *trobar clus*

or valor turns to villain, turns to virulence

mal odoratum
rapina convertit in praedem convertit in contagionem
    foedens cibum sub caeno

convertit in pestem
                ultione verberatam

---

malodorous
ravage turns to plunder turns to infestation
  digging under dirt for grub

---

turns to plague
                whipped with revenge

a
cure
haunting
the
test
tube
you
hope

then I =waste=, =zap=, =nuke=, =rub out= you, I =croak=, =snuff=, =bump off=, =knock off=, =bushwack=, =lay out= you, I = polish off=, =blow away=, =blot out=, =erase=, =wipe out=, =blast=, =do in= you, I = off=, =ice=, =hit=, =gun down=, =pick off=, =put to bed with a shovel=, = take care of= you, I =take out=, =take for a ride=, =give the works to=, =get=, =fix=, =settle=, =spill blood=, =let blood as in waste=, =nuke=, =zap=, =croak= you
in the name of
aborticide, amicicide, ceticide, deicide, elephanticide, formicide, fratricide, fungicide, genocide, giganticide, gynicide, herbicide, homicide, infanticide, insecticide, mariticide, matricide, germicide, ovicide, parenticide, parricide, patricide, pesticide, regicide, rodenticide, sororicide, spermatazoicide, autocide, tauricide, tickicide, uxoricide, vaticide, filaricide, vespacide, viricide

as in

how Jill & I don masks of black cloth, veils, gloves, black hats, jump suits, dressed for outer space to attack the wasp colony, an attack of horrible vespacide—with guns of poison—

how people burn ticks to death in these mountains

how the

disaccord mongers contention ones warfarers do battle

&
random rancor
again, again
    as in Rwanda, Tutsis slaughtered in hospital beds

dragged from homes & hacked to bits in the streets
insatiable mad cry for blood
woman with babes on back hacking at women with babes on back

virtuc, virtus

klea andron
(the glorious deeds of great heroes dead)
what heroes are these skulking the battlefield?

arma virumque cano

one's lot or *moira* unchangeable
but when Achilles wondered to sit his anger out
rather than slaughter Atrides
Athena drew down & shined
he knew her by her eyes
so terrible they were
sparkling with ardor
She speaks:

Thou seed of Jupiter
I come from heaven to see anger settled
I am sent from Juno
Draw no sword
Use words
Use words
Throws reins on thy passions
& serve us

Homer's goddess & Chapman's differ in this important
compromising point about action & word

or the importance of the forum
of the model Roman state
model of a well-ordered society
versus heathen chaos

gone down the tubes

Brunellesci's new order & subsequent disgrace makes a headline
the streets of Rome filled with rubble

disease & health of
the Body Politic

how Coriolanus' love of his mother was strange

There's no man in the world
More bound to's mother
& wracked by her grip

toughened in the womb

"What he hath done famously though soft-conscienced men
can be content to say it was for his country, he did it to please
his mother. . ."

how the tapers turned bedward
O Volumnia
voluptuous one

this is a sorry state to lose valor
to be robed in bed in sanctity
of a darker deed

Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st from me. . .
he said
ut verba soni sint lateres
et infecta cruore

---

so that the words are building blocks of sound
& are tainted in blood

---

antebellum

wash them back, back, into bellissima bellicose Latin
sweet tongued, church tongued

---

or
tense sport & action
of my personal histories or heroes

wash wash back to cleanse a literal sound
of war & bellissima bellicose mutterings

of religious traumas
material gatherings

wages of fear
in a country Mafia moulded

they don't look back on the bloody battlefield
like a money market, bodies gored
of bombs,
plastiques

of migrations
the mighty cartels & spoils of commerce

& fights over borders

fights over goods & in a
comparison of loves. . . . . .

Damoetas & Menalcas speak:

—The Muse began with Jupiter & he's everywhere. He makes
[the Earth fecund,
he listens to my ditties.
—But Phoebus loves me. My garden is Apollo's seat.
I give him gifts. The bay-tree & hyacinth blush & bloom.
—Wanton Galatea throws me an apple. She runs off I'll follow,
[spy on her.
—But dear Amyntas is my flame. He is my flame & never coy:
—My little dog knows Delia well.
—I have a present for my Venus! I have a present for my love!
—I've noticed where the doves build their nests.

—I plucked ten golden apples for my love. All that I could I've
[sent to my
boy & there will be more!

& so on, a competition, a conversation. . .

I have a riddle: where on earth does space of sky measure three
[yards?
Answer my riddle, & I'll say Apollo's not a greater bard
I have a riddle—where on earth are flowers signed with a king's
[name?
Answer my riddle, & you shall keep Phyllis

of the borders themselves how arbitrary
a Catholic thing now,
from god to emperor to Pope

are you circumcised?
& rape to destroy the women, all sense of dignity
what of the children of these horrific couplings?

dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor
dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor factus
intra nationum sensus
fragiles et elicentes
bellicosos

---

woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe woe
woe woe woe woe woe wrought

inside ethnicities

fragile & evocative

bellicose

Anne: I took "woe" as a noun (**dolor**), not as an interjection (**vae**!), given

the adjective "wrought" in the second line. You have 20 monosyllabic "woe's"; I gave you ten bisyllabic **dolors**.

"ethnicities" is difficult. I take you to mean with it something like tribal or group sensibilities, which range from the tenuous ("fragile") through memory-laden and hope-creating ("evocative") to harder edged, dualizing, self-absorbed us-them touchiness and pugnacity ("bellicose").

I took **natio** (in preference to **tribus** or **gens** or **populus**) because **natio** feels more other-oriented and them-ier, where the alternative words feel more familial, local and us-referencing, and I was encouraged by the note in Lewis & Short that **natio** was "usually applied by Cicero to distant and barbarous people." Isn't that an aspect of the attitude you are after: the arrogance and dissension that arise from viewing others as "distant and barbarous"?

Then I took **sensus** as a generic term for the powers of perception, and it also means the results of perception: feelings, perceptions, sensations, and the mental formations which are based on those results: dispositions, attitudes, understanding, frames of mind, etc.

So here are two words for your one, but I am at a loss for a one-to-one equivalency for the conceptual layering inherent in "ethnicities"

I took all three adjectives—fragile, evocative and bellicose—in agreement with "ethnicities," not with "woe."

Latin has **evocativus**, but it means "summoning, calling forth" and the spirit of the word is more strident and bellowing than seems to fit for English "evocative," which has something wispy and wistful and tendrilish about it. So I prefer **elicitus** (whence English "elicit"), from **elicere** meaning "to draw out, entice out, lure forth, bring out, elicit." The basic word in the cluster to which **elicere** belongs is **laqueus** meaning "noose, snare."

---

sing a snare

cringe a noose

& ring

et bello mortui

& the war dead

dead of a century's pollutant streams

yet
a millennium is made up of all the words
panique de l'an mille

ab multis obtestari possit vicosque vias
itinera omnia tramitesque et intorti pavorem

one could conjure from many the streets & highways
all the roads & twisty paths & panic

speaking at the surface of ourselves still breathing he said in
Tower of Babel he said Steiner did
moving forward in the slipstream of the statements we
make about tomorrow morning, about a millennium

sing

sing
dolor dolor dolor dolor dolor

woe woe woe woe woe woe

& turn to stars

star..Cepheid..comparison star..dark star..double star..dwarf star..early-type star..eclipsing binary..eruptive variable..F star..fixed star..flare star..giant star..gravity star..Greenwich star..G star..Hydrogen star..intrinsic variable..irregular star..K star..late-type star..long period variable..M star..main sequence star..multiple star..N star..nautical star..nebulous star..neutron star..nova..O-type

star..R star..radio star..red giant..red supergiant..RR Lyrae star.. runaway star..semiregular variable..silicon star..solar or sun star.. spectroscopic binary..standard star..supermassive star..supernova ..variable star..visible binary..white dwarf..x-ray star..zenith star which are the ormulum
ON. stjarnan (whence ME. sterne)

Propter montem nos esse cano
et neminem in nos jaculantur

I sing that we are near the mountain
& no one is gunning us down

---

cogito nos ex stellarum piscumque originibus fieri
illorum omnium
quomodocumqu' opinari possimus et excogitare

I think we are made up of the genetics of stars & fish
of all those
we could ever dream or think of

---

they are in our eyeball movies
haunted by light—reflected—
little filaments of celluloid created for your eyes
hunted in light, old war flics
to flicker on a retinal screen
who climbs the edge

then take out your dictionary
take out your lexicon
& eliminate all the words
derivative of Latin
& you will harden on a harder edge

it is hard

for hard are words of harder Latin
wrung in Latin

stung in Latin
expunged in Latin
Johnny-come-lately-in-Latin

caged in Latin

fought & bled in Latin
estranged

holiest in Latin

tortured in Latin

naming the names in Latin

naming the numbers in Latin

stiff in Latin
bow down in Latin

I can't be vernacular in Latin
et verba majorum in ossibus sonunt

& words of the ancestors sound in the bones

---

pound in the bones in Latin

hearts beat in the bones:
bellum, bellum, bellum

beat in the bones:
vellum, vellum, vellum

it is plenum, plenum, plenum
virum, virum, virum
  taut grammar of futurity

ein noch nicht festgestelles Tier
("we literally hear how the verbs kill time")
(Mandelstam
on Dante's Inferno &
his own imprisonment)

est Erebus Erebus Erebus
infera fervida cano et infera gelida
quo forma renasceris cano fragmentum glaciei

ibi ita, ibi iens
ibi ivi, ibi iero

---

it is hell hell hell

hot hells and cold hells I sing of

where you reincarnate as a patch of ice I sing of

gone there, going there
have gone there, will have been going there

(Anne: Virgil refers to the nether regions as Erebus. The term is Greek (Erebos, the god of Darkness, son of Chaos, brother of Night).

For the hot and cold hells I shifted to **infera [loca]** = [the] lower [places] to mark the transition from the general hell of Erebus in the singular to the specific plurals hells of the second line.

I have not found any satisfactory way to avoid the hiatus in the second line (. . .**cano et**. . . .). Making **cano** the final word of the line yields . . .**fervida et**. . . .which is worse. You might prefer:

infera fervid' et infera gelida cano

The syntax of the third line (**quo forma**. . .) roused memories of Dr. Alan Gillingham, my Latin master at Andover. He would have cherished the problem, found it toothsome. **Cano** ("I sing of") here requires the indirect discourse construction, which uses infinitive-plus-subject-accusative for the main statement and puts subordinate clauses in the subjunctive. I took

"where you reincarnate. . ." as a subordinate clause, it being so relative in form, and hence the subjunctive mood for **renasceris**.

Finally I somehow imagined that you, in the first person, indubitably feminine, were the subject of the inflection play of the last two lines. So **ita** is past participle feminine in agreement with the assumed first person singular, **iens** the present participle, **ivi** first person singular present perfect, and **iero** same for the future perfect.

---

civis, civis, civis
a civic responsibility

we're going to wait for an Aztec now
Hold shorter, let me know
Let you know, shorter
The A 1456 crosswall
375 behind Margaret Tower
769 32L Tango
Alpha 7 & Tango
Am 432 Monitor Tower
United 224
Runway 22 left
Turn right on Hotel
Runway 32
Tango 310
500 Yankee behind
United 1490 behind
Bravo Delta behind
Give away 2 2 companies Alpha 7
Tango 7
Roger Delta
Contact Departure

it is cithera I ride
strummed

a daemon departure
locusta

lacrimare lacrimatus

an old story:
Virgil was going to destroy his book

=fluxus= & depart

where old scoundrels die a Latin death
"don't they speak Latin in Latin America?"

Virgil was going to drown his book
regnum

virum omnia plenum

Dear Anne: Dux. Virgil's word is **dux**. I do not know what daimon induced me to write ductor. Go with **dux**. Makes me want to sing: "Use **dux**, the foaming cleanser. . ." **Dux femina facti**.

The phrase caps Virgil's recounting of Dido's flight from Phoenician Tyre, after uncovering the murder of her husband by her brother, unearthing ancient buried treasure, assembling other Tyrians tired of Pygmalion's tyranny, arming them, leading them to the docks where her brother's treasure fleet lay at anchor ready to sail, seizing the ships and sailing them to the Punic coast where she then founded Carthage.

Poor Dido, twice bereaved. She loved the husband Sychaeus whom her brother murdered. He was an extremely rich man, as it happened, which may have entered Pygmalion's motives for putting him to death. Some scheme to capture his wealth.

My mother advised me that if I were to fall in love, there was no fault in falling in love with a rich girl. My father advised me that if I were to fall in love with a pair of bright eyes, I should make sure it was not the sun shining through a hole in her head that made them bright. I suppose they advised my two sisters similarly, substituting boy for girl. We failed our parents. Our first round of spouses were of ordinary means and adequate intelligence. Each of us is now divorced. None of us is rich, in consequence of marriage or divorce. I alone have remarried, though romantic hope burns bright on each sororial turn. It is advent season.

Dido, however, succeeded. She fell in love with a rich man and married him. Her parents approved and blessed the marriage. Loss, grief and sorrow ensued. I suspect Mom was not a reader of Virgil. I am not sure she would

have approved of Dido's ship-swiping either, at least not until after she realized that her dreams about how she and my father would spend his retirement did not coincide with his dreams. She then awoke to her resentment at playing second fiddle for so long. There were to be no movements when she would get to play first violin. This grieved her. It felt unjust. Yet in the milieu which formed her, the culture which Robertson Davies describes in Fifth Business, conservative Anglophilic southern Ontario after the turn of the century, **feminae** were not **duces**. **Dulces** yes, but not **duces**.

Poor Dido got rich young and was heartbroken in consequence. Twice. Is there a moral here? Is her suffering just coincidence? Just a device in Virgil's story? I think not. The issue, of course, is not how we deal with wealth that is gone. The issue is how do we deal with love that is gone. First Sychaeus, then Aeneas. How do we deal with feeling abandoned? I think that was my mother's issue at the end, even while my father was still alive. And then there was the physical wrench of his actual dying. First abandoned emotionally, then corporeally. Mom lost twice as well.

Death only reconfigures where the points of connection are situated. Forgetfulness may sever connection. But death need not.

I wonder what Dido understood?

Bill:

Latin **alere** nourish, with the parallel formation **altus** high, deep (whence altitude), **ad/ultus** ADULT. See also **ELD**. Hence **olden** ancient.

=*strummed*=

ego paupercula feminea forma

[from *Iovis 2]*

ROBERTO TEJADA

Honeycomb perfection of this form before me.
No, not one imposing megalith, neither harrowing nor laughable
—the Coatlicue stone; or the monumental head of Juárez
by Siqueiros toward the ROUTE-190-TOLLBOOTH to Puebla—
but the infinite combination of matter in myriad flux, each
[conduit
a machine in perpetual motion to generate the light
of all cities everywhere:
from this political navel to
the seamless outer fabric and the shadowhands behind
it, every interlocking part on the friezes at Mitla,
a remembered banter, a half-articulated sun
over what I'm getting at,

over these ruined phrases, see,
waking dull with repetition
and then *I vanishes with the dog-lights' sweet breathing*
over the cool wood of summer
and its countless diamonds spilling.

'OK, so I sort of got the environs right as they were rendered
around me. Here now, they just hover in place,' in/stead,
a chalk-choke foothold longed for,
rushing down Mexico City's metro, the smell
of burning rubber and baking sweat.

Wait. Not more than twenty miles from here,
in Itzamatitlán, an out-Lawrenced
repulsion—"inexplicable scent, in which
there are resin and perspiration

and sunburned earth and urine
among other things"
—tossed into the dense air
in whose dry-wicker powder
of each page turned verso
from the 5-SUN codex
of what I need to know to make the work-day-week
ennobling, the whole thing
worth it & rage-
wrecked

or watermarked
by yet another PEMEX oil-slick catastrophe
off the coast of Coatzacoalcos when dictation
recedes of a sudden in ebb
& ejaculated glow

MICHAEL HUDSON

COMPARATIVE ANATOMY

1

On camera, a heart surgeon guides
his needle, as curved and outlandish as the ones
shaped from a bone which Eskimo women
use to stitch their clothing.

He deliberately slits an artery
to observe the rate of flow.

2

In the background, the heart swells and rolls
against the chrome instruments.

A gutshot, bleeding walrus breaks
the surface of Coronation Bay.

3

They descend like miners into a dead whale,

recognizing there the importance of time beneath
a dim, decomposing Arctic sun
as they hand up the steaming organs.

The heart-lung machine mostly creates enough time.

4

A student nurse tells of her first brain surgery,
how the doctor had to crowbar out a tumor
the size of an egg, one that finally popped
out far into the air.

Eskimo women often have to chew their material,
breaking it down enough to work.

5

Vesalius of Brussels, the anatomist, hired
an illustrator from Titian's school, to place
his cadavers in pleasant

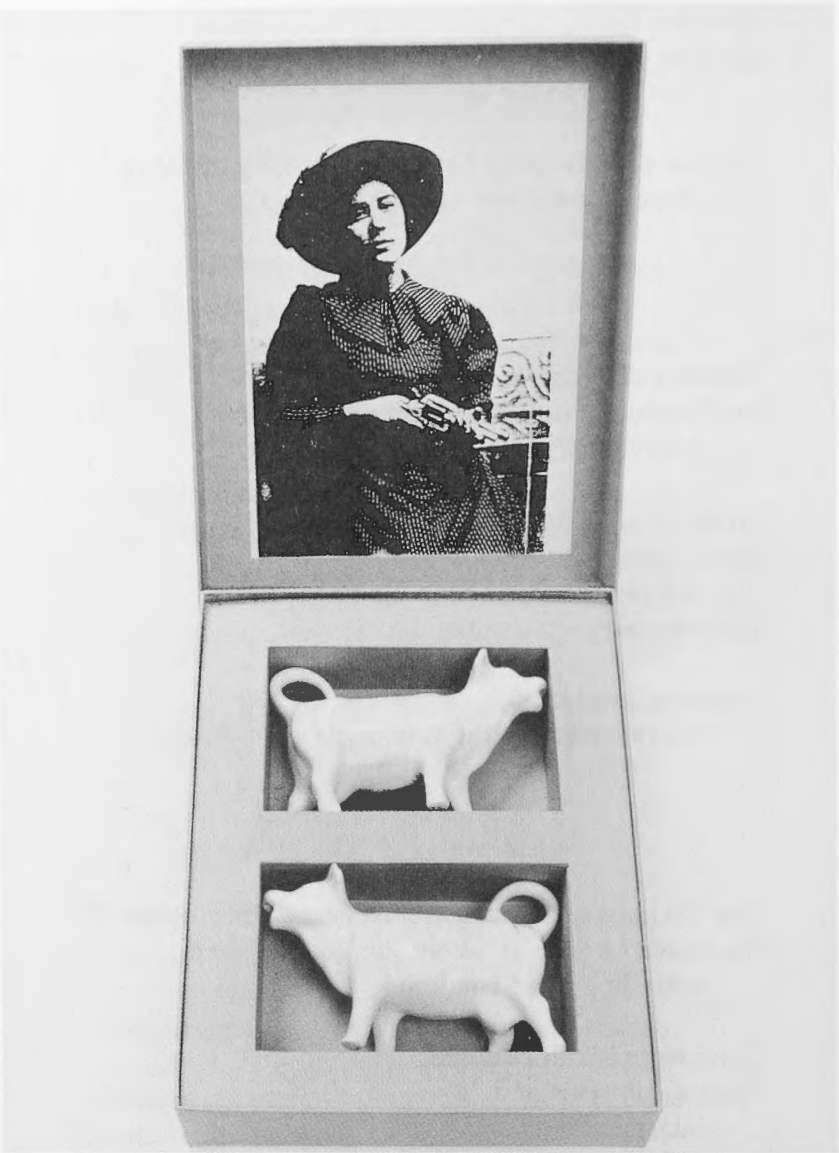
landscapes—Thorax Man cracked
open like a lobster, Musculature Man
dripping tendons from his finger tips;
the necessary

monsters who stroll
confidently past the Roman ruins of Tuscany.

6

The Eskimos of Saint Lawrence Island once broke off
the heads of dolls at a holy site, to bury them
with their dead children.

They were small, bundled
figures, hermetic and
intact, carved from a tusk.



***COWGIRL**/kou'gurl*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copied photograph of the outlaw Jennie Metcalf; two china creamers in the form of cows.
collated, 1992

JAMES CLIFFORD

IMMIGRANT

"The goal of all life is death."
—Sigmund Freud

Walking down from Hampstead Station along a well-to-do, residential street. It's April, and the gardens are starting to bloom in earnest. English Gardens—squeezed into boxes behind Council houses, strips along railroads. I recall reading about British soldiers carving plots in the blasted battlefields of the Somme, the Marne. Daydreaming along tranquil sidewalks, brushing against flowered shrubs, I almost miss one of the nicer homes, a small sign out front. The Freud Museum: 20 Marsfield Gardens, London N.W.3.

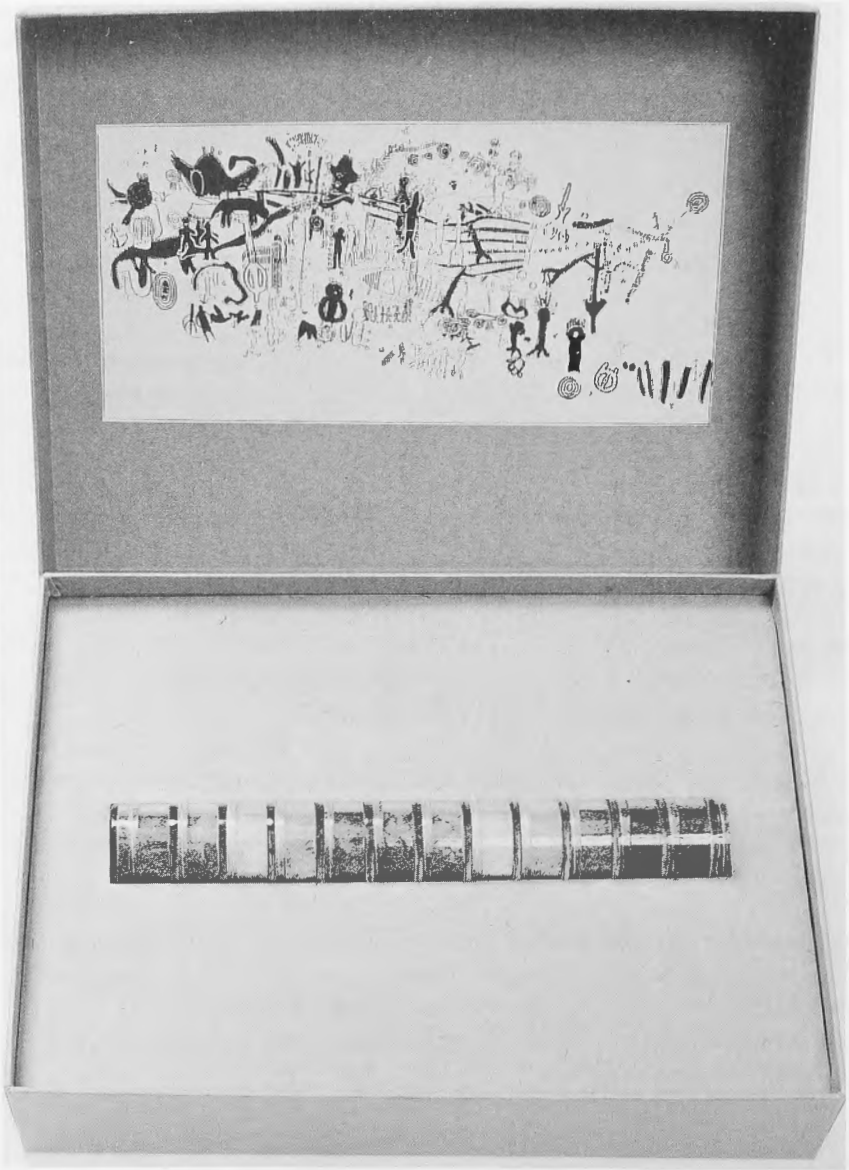
A poster: nineteenth-century photograph of a woman in Victorian dress and broad-brimmed hat. She looks coolly at the camera, fingering a big six shooter. "Susan Hiller at the Freud Museum."

Museum and shrine, the house has a lived-in quality. Freud's study is preserved, filled with favorite images and objects, his desk half-covered with statuettes from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Asia. The famous analytic couch is there.

Freud's collection of antiquities traveled with him to London when he fled the Nazis in 1938. At 20 Marsfield Gardens, terminally ill, he would spend the last year of his life, finishing *Moses and Monotheism.* He gathered himself in this house: a kind of vessel, box, a boat of the dead—carrying a body across with its beloved things.

Sources

The term origin does not mean the process by which the existent came into being, but rather what emerges from the process of becoming and disappearing. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming. . ."
—Walter Benjamin



***NAMA-MA**/mother*
custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of diagram showing Uluru cave paintings; Australian native earths collected at Papunya, in cosmetic containers. **curated,** 1991

Susan Hiller brings twenty-two cardboard boxes into the Freud Museum. Opened, they are a series of small collections, displayed in a vitrine along one side of a first-floor room. They comment on Freud's archaeology, reworking his themes: memory and forgetting, antiquity, illness, comedy, cure, death, male, female, primitive, civilization, light, dark, Greek and Jewish histories, progress, repetition. . .His world. Hers.

"That's me, displaying a beautiful dress. . ."

Archaeological collecting boxes: their lids propped open, with images and writing on the inside. The bottoms contain objects, often in hollowed-out compartments. Each ensemble has been labeled with a card, printed in museum style, recording exact size, origin, a description, and the date of processing: collected 1992, collated 1992, sampled 1993, edited 1994, . . .surveyed, located, compiled, assembled, classified, bound.

One of the boxes, "***NAMA-MA/mother,***" holds a reproduction of Aboriginal rock paintings from Uluru cave (Ayers Rock, Australia) along with twelve transparent cosmetic cases. Each contains a slightly different colored dirt. "Native earths" are used for painting rocks and (as the cosmetic cases suggest) faces. The earths suggest an ongoing process: marking of origin, nature, bodies, kinship. . ."Archaic" and "modern," contemporary.

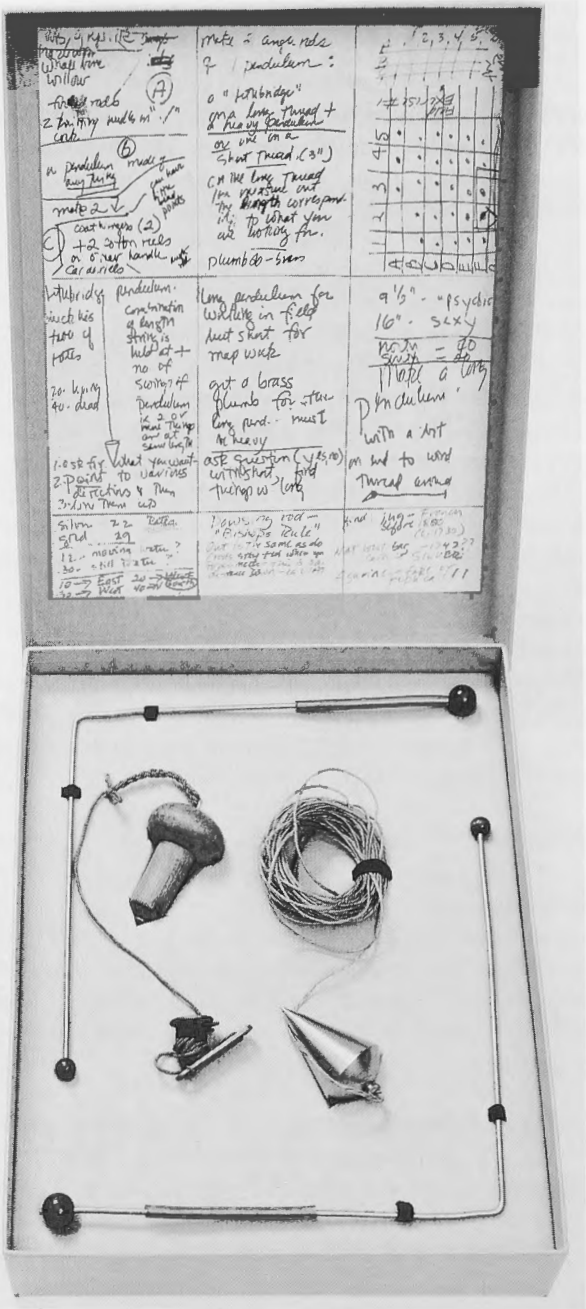
Movable dream labs.

> ***PANACEA/cure***
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied newspaper advertisement; book entitled *The Life of Joanna Southcott,* annotated and extended by the artist with photograph, flower and newspaper cutting; cover added by the artist. **filed**, 1991.

Inside the lid: an advertisement (London Evening News, 1977) from THE PANACEA SOCIETY, proclaiming that "CRIME & BANDITRY, DISTRESS OF NATIONS & PERPLEXITY will continue until the Bishops open JOANNA SOUTHCOTT'S BOX of sealed writings."

"Another summer, near Vienna. . ."

Joanna Southcott, the 18th century prophet, was to have given birth to the Messiah. Instead, she left a sealed box of writings which could only be opened by a convocation of the twenty-four bishops of England and Wales. (What annotations have been added to the book displayed here?)



VIRGULA DIVINA/water-witching
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of artist's notes on dowsing methods; artist's hand-made divining rods; two pendulae, one hand-made. **displayed,** 1991

Source of rebirth and transformation. "What does woman want?" Her closed box, book, word. Her cure for. . .

*

"These are just pictures of the waiting room. . ."

"***VIRGULA DIVINA****/water witching.*" The artist's divining rods, string, and pendulae. In the lid, her notes on dowsing.

In other boxes, I find the Greek rivers Lethe, Mnemosyne, and Acheron: corked bottles with old-fashioned tags. "***INITIATION****/*beginning." Sources. How do we know when water's below? Where should we dig?

His room: figurines like stalagmites on every table. Egypt, Greece, Rome, Assyria, Asia. . .(And just visible in the *Berggasse* photos, two Kiddush cups, one marked with the Tablets of the Law.) An Egyptian funerary boat rests on a shelf.

Her collections: Native American potsherds (in plastic bags); massed arrowheads and (xeroxed) Mayan glyphs; an African weapon bundle (made for tourists); earth from the six North Ireland counties.

Where are the sources? He excavates something long buried; and she. . .

Room

Born and educated in the United States, Susan Hiller does fieldwork on Mayan archaeology and ethnology in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala. In the late sixties, she moves to London to pursue an art career.

> ***COWGIRL****/kou' gurl*
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied photograph of the outlaw Jennie Metcalf; two china creamers in the form of cows. **collated**, 1992

Immigrant, she encounters a new slur on women: "cows." At home, cows meant only milk, pitchers, domesticity. In London the American outlaw cradles her gun/her creamer.

KOMOIΔIΔ/Comedy.
custom-made cardboard box (10 x 13.25 x 2.5"), labeled; photocopy of Victorian illustration with poem; modern English toy; two slide viewers with one replica magic lantern slide each. **organized**, 1932

In the lid: a Victorian image of Punch and Judy. Printed below: "Look here—a quarrel has begun. See how they wield their sticks. . .cruel Punch kills Judy. . .what naughty. . ." In the bottom she has placed modern puppets: Judy without a stick.

*

"I don't think I'd be a good subject for biography—not enough 'action'! You would say all there is to say in a few sentences—she spent her life with children!"

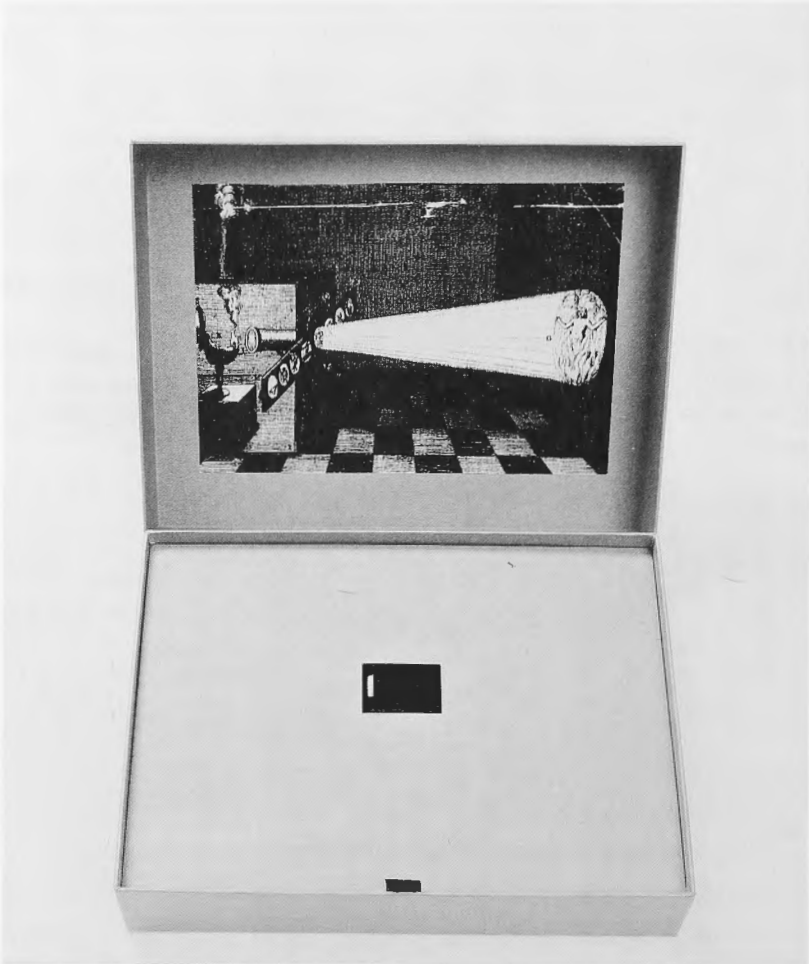
—Anna Freud

The room preserves her work places: a light writing table and a large loom. Notebooks, wool and scissors, her analytic couch. Along one wall memorabilia are gathered in a series of glass cases: books, photos, a brooch. . .

The museum pamphlet: "Anna Freud: Her Life and Work."

"In 1923 Sigmund Freud began suffering from cancer and became increasingly dependent on Anna's care and nursing. Later on, when he needed treatment in Berlin, she was the one who accompanied him there. His illness was also the reason why a 'Secret Committee' was formed to protect psychoanalysis against attacks. Anna was a member, and like the others was given a ring as a token of trust. After her father's death she was to convert one of his rings into a brooch. The Roman intaglio bears the figure of Jupiter enthroned, crowned by Victory with Minerva in attendance."

From her first-floor window I peek out at the garden, bathed in sun, not open to the public. Inside: subdued light, carpeted floors, stairs. . .Voices down the hall where three videos play in series: Eli Wallach (a documentary based on photos of the Freuds' Vienna apartment, *Berggasse* 19); Sigmund Freud (defining his achievement for the BBC); Anna Freud (narrating home movies of the family).



***SEANCE**/seminar*
custom-made cardboard box (10" x 13.25" x 2.5"), labelled; photo-copied engraving from Athanasius Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae,* 1671; miniature television monitor (l.c.d. type) showing a program by the artist entitled *Bright Shadow.*
edited, 1994

The dining room: ". . .painted peasant furniture which came from Anna Freud's and Dorothy Burlingham's country cottage at Hochrotherd in Austria. Also in the room is a souvenir painting of the alpine region where Freud usually spent his holidays, walking in the countryside he loved." "Later she was to say of this period: 'Back then in Vienna we were all so excited—full of energy: it was as if a whole new continent was being explored, and we were the explorers. . .'"

Euch/prayer
custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied map; teserae and modern marble slab found at the entrance to the underworld near Vathia.
presented, 1991

Home-Movie

Her voice from the next room.

In front of translucent curtains, a video screen, moving images. The veiled garden. "This is Paula, our housekeeper, still with us. . ."

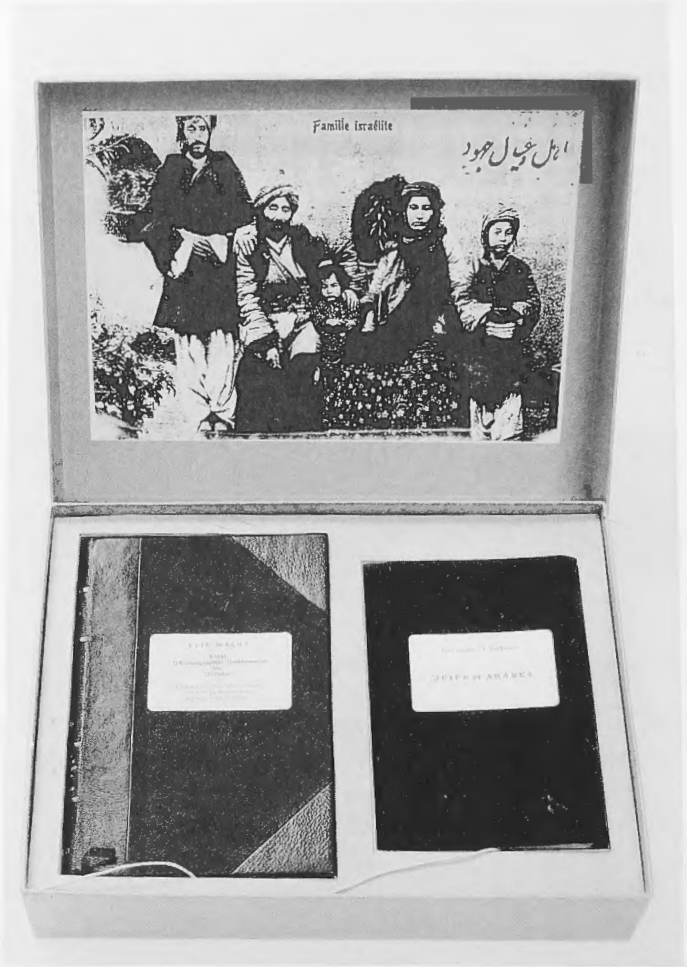
Sunday visits to his mother. "As you see, she had lovely white hair. . ." Martha Freud and her sister, Mina Bernays. Sigmund Freud and his "very beloved" chow dog, "Jofi."

"My father didn't like to be photographed, and usually made a face."

Candid shot in a garden, happily talking archaeology with a friend from Rome. "Another Summer, near Vienna." Visitors offering gifts—the Freuds' 50th anniversary. "Now you will see. . ."
His sister who died in the concentration camps (her hand on his knee).

ADHS/Hades
custom-made cardboard box {13.25" x 10 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopied photograph taken near the Necromanteion of Ephyra, ancient oracle of the dead and sanctuary of Persephone and Hades; water collected from the river Acheron, in chemical flask, sealed and tagged. **surveyed**, 1993

A movie camera wanders through gardens filled with flickering shades. Stills: "My father as a boy. . .my grandmother as a younger woman. . .my father and mother, again, in one of their summer rental houses. . ."



***MOROR**/bitter*
custom-made cardboard box (10" x 13.25" x 2.5"), labelled; photo-copied illustration from book; two books modified by the artist; *Essai D'Ethnographie Traditionelle des Mellahs*, etc., Elie Malka, Morocco, n.d. and *Juifs et Arabes*, Salamon D. Gottein, Paris 1957. **labelled,** 1993

Princess Marie Bonaparte, who took most of these films, sits in Freud's waiting room.

Berggasse 19. Swastikas. Vienna crowds. "That's some stranger. . ."

En route for London, her father wrapped in blankets, ailing. On the terrace at Marie Bonaparte's in Paris. Meeting of Freud's new chow, "Lün" and the Princess's chow, "Tatoun." Curly tails waving. . .his stiff face.

London: "Jumbo," the little Pekingese. "We were hoping my father would take to him as a temporary replacement." (She speaks as of a child. . .) But he is loyal to Lün, in quarantine. Glimpse of Ernest Jones.

*

*"**simchas**)/joy."* Microscope and magic lantern transparencies, found at the Freud Museum: blow fly, dandelion head, bird beak, the royal family, Swiss Family Robinson, heroes (coast guards), Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Mickey Mouse in Africa. . .

*

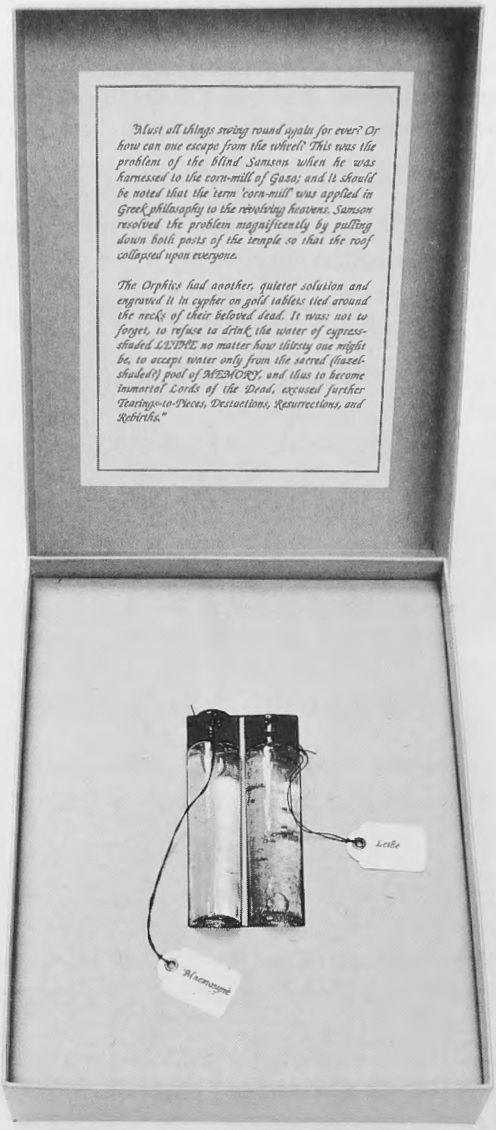
20 Marsfield Gardens: more visitors, "the last birthday". . .swaddled outdoors, on a couch of some kind. People approach, he nods. . .

The flickering. . .

Women of 20 Marsfield Gardens: Martha Freud, Minna Bernays, Anna Freud, Paula Fichtl, and Dorothy Burlingham (Anna's American companion).

> ***HEIMLICH**/homely*
> custom-made cardboard box {13.25 x 10 x 2.5}, labeled; photocopy of Breton angel of death; 45 rpm record of Johnny Ray singing *Look Homeward Angel.* **Referenced**, 1994

Freude. Animated, he's standing in the garden to receive a delegation from the Royal Society, writing his name in a big book. Happy (she says) to see his signature near Charles Darwin's.


"Must all things swing round again for ever? Or how can one escape from the wheel? This was the problem of the blind Samson when he was harnessed to the corn-mill of Gaza; and it should be noted that the term 'corn-mill' was applied in Greek philosophy to the revolving heavens. Samson resolved the problem magnificently by pulling down both posts of the temple so that the roof collapsed upon everyone.
The Orphics had another, quieter solution and engraved it in cypher on gold tablets tied around the necks of their beloved dead. It was: not to forget, to refuse to drink the water of cypress-shaded LYDIE no matter how thirsty one might be, to accept water only from the sacred (hazel-shaded?) pool of MEMORY, and thus to become immortal Lords of the Dead, excused further Tearing-to-Pieces, Destuctions, Resurrections, and Rebirths."
Lethe
Mnemosyne

***EAUX-DE-VIE**/spirits*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of text by Robert Graves; water collected from the Lethe and Mnemosyne, in antique bottles, corked, sealed and tagged. **annotated,** 1993

Crossing

A tiny TV monitor nestled in one of her boxes plays a program called "Bright Shadow."

Lucid: Freud refused morphine, until he asked for a lethal dose.

". . .everything went downhill rapidly. A distressing symptom was an unpleasant odor from the wound, so that when his favorite chow was brought to visit him she shrank into a far corner of the room, a heartrending experience which revealed to the sick man the pass he had reached. He was getting very weak and spent his time in a sick bay in his study from which he could gaze at his beloved flowers in the garden."

Lucid, [L. *lucidus*, light, clear]. . .in astronomy, visible to the naked eye: said of a star.

". . .it was as if a whole new continent. . ."

"***LA PESTE****/plague.*" Photograph (in a rearview mirror). Glimpse of the artist and a *momento mori* of the Great Plague: stone skulls at a London churchyard. Inside the lid: world map, charts, data on "The current global situation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic."

Crumbling borders. . .

Wandering

"***PLIGHT****/plite.*" A modern sand painting. The Teepee: ". . .made of sands collected from the deserts and mountains of the southwestern United States. This painting is durable and can be dusted with a soft dry cloth."

plight, v. t. to weave, to braid, to plait. [Obs.]
A *plighted* garment of diverse colors.
—Milton

"The skin is transparent and allows light from the sun to shine through, thereby giving light and heat within."

Through his clenched lids, light, a garden. . .

***HEIMBLICH**/homely*
custom-made cardboard box {13.2" x 10" x 2.5"}, labelled; photo-copy of Breton angel of death; 45 rpm record of Johnny Ray singing *Look Homeward Angel.*
rferenced, 1994

*

"I Wander thro' each charter'd street,. . ."

From Old Street Station I take City Road to Bunhill Fields Burying Ground. Across the street is Wesley's Chapel and House (museum). In the cemetery, a collection of Old London, I find the graves of William and Catherine Blake, Bunyan, Defoe. There are others of note: antislavery crusaders, writers of hymns, an inventor of insurance. Some of the stones were moved here, replanted.

Eddying waters of Mnemosyne and Lethe.

Next the modern wasteland of the Barbican, where "Defoe" and "Shakespeare" are towers of flats, looming over pedestrian walkways. Arrows point to the Museum of London, at the far side of the vast complex. I meet only a half dozen people on my way—including an elderly woman, who grips a wheeled walker, inching along, head down.

*

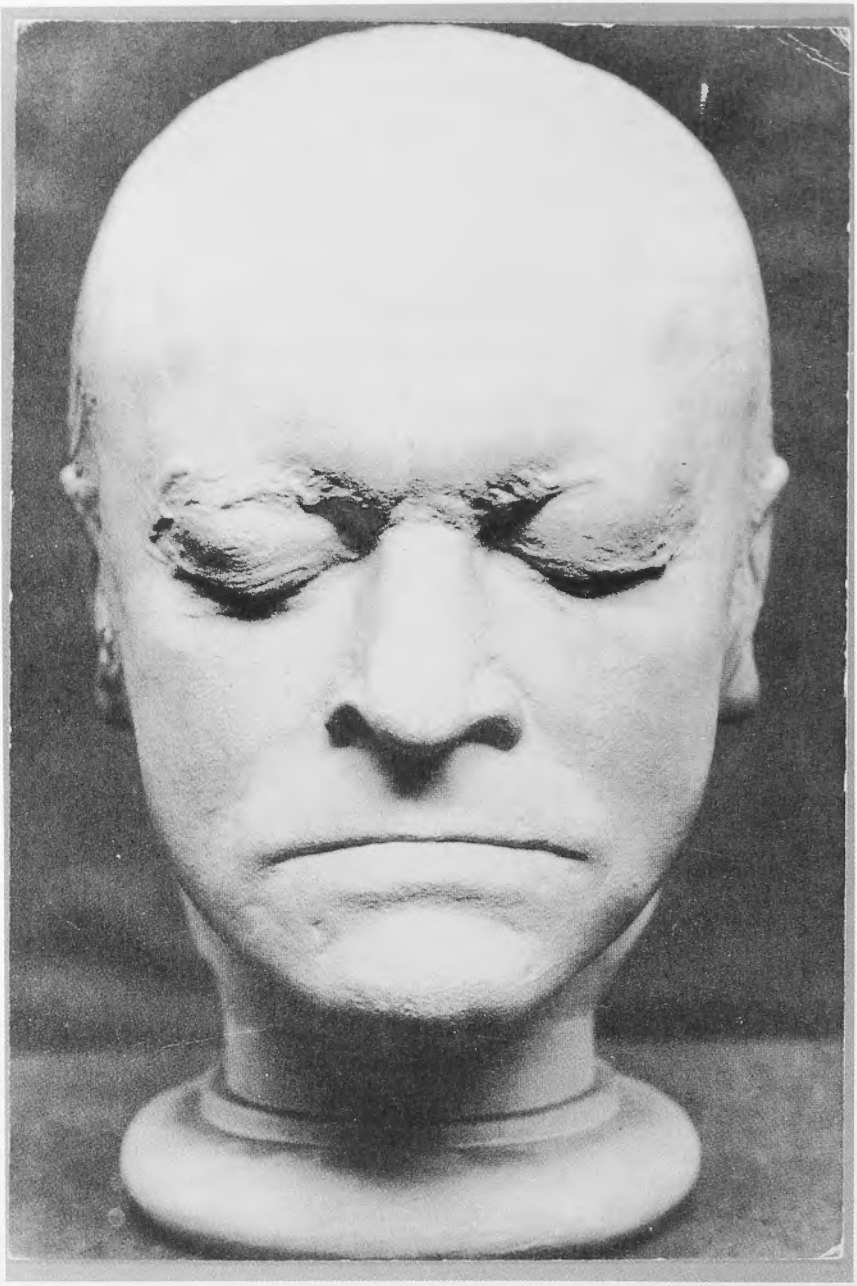
Wandering vine. . .

"Blake had left Poland Street in 1790, soon after the death of his mother . . .[He] and Catherine now moved to 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, on the south bank of the Thames."

> ***CHAMIN-HA'**/House of Knives*
> custom-made cardboard box {10" x 13.25 x 2.5"}, labeled; photocopy of Mayan calendar glyphs, numerals and day names; obsidian blades. **collected** 1992

"Gilchrist describes the house as a humble, one-storeyed building; but Frederick Tatham, a friend of Blake's later years, remembers it as 'a pretty, clean house of eight or ten rooms,' a typical London terrace house of the eighteenth century, with the usual strip of garden behind. In this garden grew a 'wandering vine,' unpruned, to form the arbor where, according to one of those legends which no official denial can kill, Mr. and Mrs. Blake were once surprised by a friend in the dress of Eden, with the addition only of helmets (a detail which comes through the painter George Richmond), occupied in the reading aloud of *Paradise Lost.*"

Dwelling/traveling. . .



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"The Peopling of London" exhibition: a city of outsiders, from its Roman, Saxon, Viking, Norman beginnings through waves of Europeans, Asians, Jews, Huguenots, Irish, Arabs, Cypriots, Latin Americans. . ., ending with the recent influx from former colonies.

I pick up a telephone in the Museum of London and hear the voice of a woman recalling her arrival from Jamaica in 1955: her astonishment, looking out a window on her first day, to see white men digging up the street.

Postcards: an eighteenth-century black merchant seaman and street singer who wears a model ship on his hat; suffragettes picketing, one of them an Indian princess. And in the Museum's foyer: a traveling exhibit on London's Sephardim: Greece, Morocco, Spain, Iraq, India, Guatemala. . .

Outside the Barbican and heading for St. Paul's, I again pass the woman, bent over her walker. She doesn't look up from the pavement. Where, *where in the world*, is she going?

Gathering

Anna Freud traveled frequently to America.

Susan Hiller goes back and forth to Ireland, Greece, Australia, the (Native) Americas. . .She collects things without apparent value. Tourist art, scraps of pottery, toys, forgotten books, stones, dirt, water. Archaeologist and pilgrim: scavenger of futures. . .In Delphi she collects from the Castillian Spring; in Ireland her bottle fills from the Well of St. Brigit; she returns from Australia with "native earths."

Where (in the world) are her sources. . .

"***MOROR****/bitter.*" "Famille israélite." There's an Arabic inscription. An old photograph shows Arab Jews posing serenely: two bearded men in turbans; two demure children; a woman, impassive, in draped scarf and richly flowered dress.

In another box. . .White patriots hurl stones at dark Jews: illustration photocopied from a 1927 pamphlet, *The Jewish Minority in Roumania*. . ., "showing ethnic cleansing."

Blood lines and the "New Europe." A dying man wrapped in blankets. English Channel.

"If Moses was an Egyptian. . ."

*

From Vienna, Freud traveled as a pilgrim, she says. . .especially to Rome where he discovered "inner" meanings and archaeological images for the psyche. She says her own travels are pilgrimages too.

Pilgrimage: an activity long open to women; close to tourism (her souvenirs recall); discovery as repetition.

". . .my father and mother, again."

Freud collected the world, its origins and history. On his desk, a loved figure of ancient Egypt. . ."Everything is decontextualized," she says, "and put in a situation of being possessed by a European of a certain generation. Of course I'm aware that even my collection could come to look like that eventually."

". . .an eddy in the stream of becoming."

She gathers souvenirs, scraps and secrets, bringing them into his house, among his things. Her open suitcases.

Anna Freud traveled frequently to. . .

*

Worlds

Outside 20 Marsfield Gardens, afternoon light edges new leaves in the English gardens.

Europe seems far from California, where I live on a bay facing West; toward the East.

In boxes of memory and forgetting, belongings.

Growing up in New York, London was my source. But now. . .

Limahuli Gardens: native plants on the island of Kaua'i.
A house, trees, a spring in the south of France.
Egyptian nightjars song.

And the palms, araucaria pines. Valley of Hienghène, New Caledonia.

I'm telling my Melanesian guide that, to me, the dwellings seem strangely bare. . .while the habitat is so full, so carefully tended. He pauses a moment. "Mais, c'est a la maison."

A sweep of the arm collects trees, river, breeze, stones, mountains—the dead.

SOURCES

Boxes: Susan Hiller, *At the Freud Museum, 1994*, photographs courtesy of Book Works, London.

Sigmund Freud: quoted by Norman O. Brown in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, 182.

Walter Benjamin: from *The Origin of German Classic Drama*, John Osborne, trans. (altered), 45.

Anna Freud: quoted by Robert Coles in *Anna Freud: the Dream of Psychoanalysis*, 3.

From "Anna Freud: Her Life and Work" and "Freud Museum." Orientation pamphlets, the Freud Museum, London.

Anna Freud: video commentary on family movies at the Freud Museum

William Blake, "London," from *Songs of Experience*.

Kathleen Raine: from *William Blake*, 63.

Ernest Jones: from *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 3., 245.

Susan Hiller: from *Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller*. Edited by Barbara Einzig, forthcoming.

Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 17.

Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Valley of Hienghène, New Caledonia.

All other quotations are from Susan Hiller's boxes at the Freud Museum.

Postcards: Egyptian funerary boat in Freud's collection; Freud's desk in his study at the Freud Museum: William Blake, plaster-cast from a life mask, 1823, National Portrait Gallery.

Thanks to Judith Aissen and Ty Miller for help with this text.

About Susan Hiller

I was introduced to Susan Hiller's work some years ago by Barbara Einzig, who saw affinities between our respective researches at the edges of anthropology. I was immediately struck by Hiller's unique mix of off-center ethnographic analysis and oneiric exploration. She scribbles beautiful, illegible writing over photo-machine portraits; she organizes fieldwork by sleepers in meadows and carefully maps their dreamscapes; she collects old coastal postcards of "rough seas;" she builds a memorial, with plaques and recorded voices, to lost heroes of aquatic rescues; she works with television fantasies and makes paintings on domestic wallpaper. In her work, ordinary things take on a strange density, migrating among the meaning systems of found art, cultural artifacts, junk, personal fetishes, memorials, relics, tools, souvenirs, and. . .

Born in the United States, trained in anthropology and archaeology, with field experience in Mexico, Belize and Guatemala, Susan Hiller left the discipline after what she has described as "a crisis of conscience." Sharply critical of all objectivism and primitivism she has retained an interest in taxonomy, collecting, and the juxtaposition of discrepant meaning systems. In the years around 1970 she traveled widely and moved to London where, in 1973, she had her first solo exhibition. Since then her installations, writings, paintings, photographs and video work have probed the marginal, unconscious aspects of contemporary cultural production. Death, language, and desire have been recurring themes. Hiller has retained an "archaeological" concern for non-Western and ancient forms of expression, understood as current resources, partially translatable in modern Western contexts. Much of her work can be described as a kind of uncanny ethnography—oneirographic or perhaps auratographic—evoking suppressed meanings and histories.

These concerns are evident in the archaeological sorting boxes Susan Hiller brought into the Freud Museum during the Spring of 1994. The undertaking was part of a larger project, "The Reading Room," organized by Book Works, a publisher of artists' books in London. Hiller's *After 'The Freud Museum,'* documenting and extending her installation, will appear this fall (Book Works Press: 19 Holywell Road, London EC2A 4JB) Her extensive critical comments on the project can be found in *Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller* (selected talks, seminars, interviews 1977-95), edited and introduced by Barbara Einzig, Preface by Lucy Lippard, Manchester University Press 1995. Along with many catalogues and essays, Susan Hiller has also published *Dreams: Visions of the Night,* London: Thames and Hudson; New York: Avon, 1976/1994, and has edited *The Myth of Primitivism,* New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

PAUL METCALF

CEASE AND DESIST

EXTRACTS

Schizophrenics are unlicensed poets.
—anonymous

For under the language we have been listening to all our lives, a new, a more profound language. . .offers itself. It is what they call poetry. . . .[And] it is that, we realize, which beyond all they have been saying is what they have been trying to say.
—William Carlos Williams

Why did she keep walking beside me and watching me? As if she were trying to recognize me with her bleared eyes, that looked as though some diseased person had spat slime into the bloody lids? And how came that little gray woman for a whole quarter of an hour by my side before a shop window, showing me an old, long pencil, that came pushing infinitely slowly out of her miserable, clenched hands? I pretended to look at the display in the window and not notice anything. But she knew I had seen her, she knew I stood there wondering what she was really doing. For I understood quite well that the pencil in itself was of no consequence, I felt it was a sign, a sign for the initiated, a sign the outcast knew; I guessed she was indicating to me that I should go somewhere or do something.
—Rainer Maria Rilke

ONE

SUPERSTYLOPHOTOTUTORIZATION : Higher Education

Courses of study:

Teetotalization—Addition and sobriety
Semihectology—Study of half hundreds
Pyrocardiology—The study of heartburn
Circlingology—Study of a rolling cigarette
Osteophotocardiology—Bones, lights and hearts!

Superstylophototypotermination: An excellent word!—
it has five T's.
The longest word of all, it has fifty letters: *Semicentio-*
steophotoseismophysiopleopolycomputation

(I can read Coptic Braille)

* * *

My universe is small, you see,
there's only me—and me—and me.

I sang my didn't,
I danced my did

both in it
and out of it

(Translibation—moving
drinks from place to place)

When I eat,
there is another head inside my head,

that eats with me,
The inside of my body is empty,
it is only a frame,
the food does not remain,
it disappears, evaporates. . .

You are using my lips to speak—you!—
your words, shaping my lips,
passing under the roof of my mouth, inwards,
and my mouth, and my own words, and my thoughts
are phantoms, shadowing the altogether
other, shaping words—yours!—
and I haven't the scent, the smelling
is your smelling, your inhalation in my nose!
My palm roots the beckoning of your fingers.
You are in me! In *me!* You step in my pace,
your eyes in my hollows turn inwards,
stare into my head;
and I lean, and do not fall,
on the scaffold of your bones.

In this interior decoration, there is some congestion that squanders in the mind. . .

Stay away from crowds, the elbow-people, your feet will tangle with somebody else's. . .

How came such poisoned pap from so excellent an udder?

* * *

(Semicitation—half a quote. . .
or believing only half of what
you hear.)

* * *

Waiting is starved living. . .

* * *

There are little people who live inside me. They are hard to see, invisible, like air. . .but I hear them talking. . .

* * *

Each of us is a corpuscle in the bloodstream, forever circulating.

(*Disproportionability*—Act of getting out of proportion.)

I oil my body, because it is a machine, and it must be lubricated.

(*Contourability*—Ability to shape up.)

I get shaky in the knees, and my chest is like a mountain in front of me, and my body actions are different. The arms and legs are apart and away from me and they go on their own. . .Sometimes I let my arms roll to see where they will land.

(*Manustupration*—Kneeling down, handling myself.)

* * *

A butterfly is flying up from my chest.

I am going to grow up to be a blue grasshopper.

On the average, dinosaurs lived for 100 million years, and each ordinary day seemed to them like days within days and years within years. Especially on winter afternoons when the snow swirled between the steep-roofed buildings and the dinosaurs drifted among them like enormous shadows, time stood still, frozen and unpromising. "Will it ever be spring for me?" the dinosaurs asked then, and the mother dinosaur in each family told the six big wife

dinosaurs and the one smaller husband dinosaur about the old days, when the grass was high and green and the farmers put out piles of pumpkins for them to eat. (A dinosaur could swallow a pumpkin without having to chew it.) There were Coke machines in the meadows then, and around them were scattered all the cigarette butts anyone could want.

The pipe I smoke, with its curious pitted bowl, was made from the leg of an octopus.

* * *

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me. . .

Moonshine blessedness flutters toward me.

I wing my way through the spaces of thought with the agility of a swallow.

Ah! the sweet relaxation of madness! To laugh and cry, chatter and shriek, whistle, sing, flute, fife, fiddle, run, dance and wrestle. . .

(*Malmentation*—Sickness of mind.)

* * *

I felt myself getting younger; but
even as I diminished in body and age,
I discovered I was nine centuries old:

the nine centuries made me young.

To be nine centuries old
meant I was not yet born.

* * *

If the world were my oyster.
were my cup of tea,
I'd make those shitheads
Bow down to me.

T W O

cease and desist

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ANTONIN ARTAUD

FRAGMENTATIONS

(Tr. from the French by Clayton Eshleman, with Bernard Bador)

Out of the cunt without the mother I will make an obscure, total, obtuse and absolute soul.

*

Yesterday evening March 13th Yvonne's party.
Children of the quickening little stick.
The Etruscan clay pot.

*

Being is that parasitism of the brain that I have begun *by daylight* in order to rid myself of god and his sbirros: the diseases, the night.

*

Born gradually this unconscious that I had like the hardest of the hard before the coffin of my six daughters of the heart to be born:

Yvonne,
Caterine,
Neneka,
Cécile
Ana
and
Little Anie.

*

Before they got away from me I had already blasted them into a state more terrifying than that god they reached only later.

*

Bigger on this floor where the biggest one was hardening to she-death, not like a knee barded with a kneecap, but like the infinitely small that progresses into the angle of its sempiternal strangulation.

*

Which indeed is not in philosophy, but in the pan of fried potatoes, square perhaps and with the handle of the cantilever which bears like the spoon in the perforated tongue of the sex organ forever denied by the heart.

*

A dead little girl said: I am the one who bubbles over with horror in the lungs of the living. Get me out of here right away.

*

They blew terms of dead wax on the condemned bodies of beings and made stupefying retentions of them, who, before birth, were not, but who,

insulin by insulin,

were believed to be,

and yet the artichoke gets worked up in its stalk when a virgin makes caca.

Insulin it's Ka without shit, shit without making caca.

*

There are only the dead

asleep in me,

some are free, they are outside,

the others in this hellish dung heap where my thighbone ceaselessly goes forth and grazes in order to undermine hell.

*

Yesterday Friday March 15th in the installation of my suffering, the dialectic entered me like the derision of my living flesh which suffers but does not understand.

*

Morphine on a wooden leg, done, this morphine, with the gangrene of the dead leg's bones, then drawn off, here is what the holy trinity was.

*

It isn't enough to agitate fluids in order to explain consciousness which is not a common spirit but the volume of a body's timbre up to the point where it arms its way in in order to be, against the spirit that will *calculate* it.

*

Evil spirits are not mental states but beings who never wanted to

en-dure themselves.

*

The spirits will not take care of my affairs and I will regulate them always with my hands and without a concept, like a worker adjuster of limbs whose principle is in my sperm box, and the coffins of my stake legs.

*

But once the stake is out, the question is no longer of adjusting limbs, but of making it, it, explode into a limb which does not suffer replacement.

*

For the children of the principle stage setting,
they're not in the sound, but in the cunt,
which is not the original granary of a principle but a terrifying chewing.

Not in the tone, but in the cunt, drastic bend of this ground swell, advancing with its horrible denture of beings, created to swallow up all beings, but who never know where they are.

*

In slumber one sleeps, there is no self, nobody only specters,

snatching of the tétême of being, by other beings (at that moment awake), from that which makes one a body.

And what is the tétême?

The blood of the body at that moment stretched out, dozing because it is sleeping. How can the tétême be blood? By the *éma,* before which rests the t and designates that which rests like the té vé of the Marseillais. For the té makes a cinder sound when the tongue places it on the lips where it will smoke.

And Éma in Greek means blood. And tétême, twice the cinder on the flame of the blood clot, this inveterate clot which is the body of the sleeping dreamer who would do better to wake up.

—For neither the unconscious nor the subconscious is the law.

Each dream is a piece of suffering torn out of us by other beings, by chance with the monkey hand which they throw upon me every night, the resting cinder of our self which is not a cinder but a hail of bullets as the blood is scrap iron and the self ferruginous.

And what is the ferruginous?

It's this simple: a head, a trunk on two legs, and two arms to rock the trunk in the sense of always being more with a head, two legs and two arms.

For it has been said from time immemorial that the illiterate is a mystery, without alpha and without omega, but with a head, two legs, two arms.—The oafish illiterate of the simple which is man and doesn't understand. He understands that he is head and arms, legs to get the trunk moving. And that there is nothing else apart from that: this totem of eyelids ears, and a nose drilled by twenty fingers.

And that is the mystery of man which god the spirit has never ceased pestering.

*

There is no inside, no spirit, outside or consciousness, nothing but the body as it may be seen, a body that does not cease being, even when the eye that sees it falls.

And this body is a fact.
Me.

*

Sperm is not urination but a being who always toward a being advances to torrefy it with itself.

*

Not a fiction, this sperm, but war with thorn-crowned cannons which churn their own grapeshot before *churning* the ONE entry.

*

Operation from which man fell the day he consented to play the fool.

*

And 2°
secondly
it was not nails
but nothingness,
which one day proclaimed itself a nail,
because it had scraped my head too much and because I, Antonin Artaud, to punish it for sucking my head I turned it into a nail with one hammer blow.

*

I saw Yvonne's bloated sac, I saw the sac bloated with the dregs of Yvonne's blistered soul, I saw that horrific soft sac of Yvonne's sodomized soul, I saw Yvonne's swelling heart punctured, like an enormous bloated sac of pus, I saw the corpse of this insulted Ophelia crawling not on the Milky Way, but on the way of human filth, cursed, reviled, loathed, I saw the corpse of she who loved me subjected to rancid belches of the soul with kicks and slaps,

I saw at last the abhorred bloating, the hideous swelling of this heart plagued for having wanted to bring me a metalloid when I had nothing to eat,

I saw it pass, this brown sac like the pus of despair, I saw pass the dead goiter of my daughter whom life had seized upon to repel and infect.

I saw her repel herself, bitterdead from having been so insulted.

*

I saw the corpse of my daughter Anie reduced to ashes and her sex organ dilapidated and divided after her death, by the police of the French.

*

Priests are asses without egos who are endlessly talking into the asses of others in order to implant their ego there.

*

I saw the meningeal syphilis of my daughter Caterine's legs, and the two hideous potatoes of her swollen kneecaps, I saw the onions of her toes blistered like her sex organ which she has no longer been able to wash for a year after she began her march. I saw it burst from her skull like Anie of the "Holy" Throat, and I saw the intestinal crown of thorns of her blood flowing from her on non-menstrual days.

And I saw the notched knife of my other daughter Neneka who I felt moving in the opium of the earth,

and there were also Yvonne, Caterine, Cécile, Anie and Ana with Neneka.

And she as the dental opium, for nothing is harder than a raging toothache. The opium of the earth's masticatory canines which everyone has been crushing underfoot.

She loved me when I was chewing one day in order to compose the earth, the earth which I will eat.

And I saw the human phallus, thrashing the breasted heart of Cécile,

in that groove of a bone rack,

where the soul to be confirmed smells of a dead woman,
open mouth of an imperishable cellar.

For the offered blood smells of cinders in the casks of its cellar.—
And how many testicles of hatred have flogged this firstborn heart?

There still remains Ana and Anie.

*

It's chance which is infinity and not god, and what is chance?

It's *me,* my me told me who listens to me.

And I answered him: All my selves have reached this stage because as far as I am concerned I'm not listening to you.

*

It's Ana who loved the music one day from the top of that shed who is listening to me, when I'm thinking not of myself but of her. Who is she?

The soul that will be born from me.

All of this is very well, but when will I again see Ana Corbin across whose belly the whole medical profession has passed, Ana Corbin named a slut by all the petites-bourgeoises tarts from Saint-Roch to Notre-Dame-des-Champs?

Ana Corbin, firstborn daughter of my soul, and who died despairing of me.

Never!

Yes, one day, the day soon when I'll finally be able to eat.

*

And to marry me Ana Corbin will have waited for the earth to be cleaned, like Yvonne, Cécile, Anie, Caterine and Neneka, these dead, who beyond the distress of their limbs, are waiting before coming to me until I have got done marrying my Ka Ka.

*

There one would have to eat the earth, once.

*

And I have seen Martha Robert in Paris, I saw her from Rodez to Paris leaning forward angrily in the angle of my closed room, right in front of my night table, like a flower extirpated angrily, in the apocalypse of life.

*

And there was also Colette Thomas, to blow the gendarmes of hatred from Paris to Nagasaki.

She will explain to you her own tragedy.

POST-SCRIPTUM

I had a dream last night, scrambled, yes indeed, for a scrambled dream it sure was scrambled. But so meaningful on the other hand, so meaningful.

Jean Dequeker was dragging himself along the earth with short and truncated legs, and he said: Am I a beast, a pebble, a branch or a meat stall?

But after all what is a tree? What is a tree?

Madame Dequeker was behind a cage with her stomach pressed against the flange of this cage, saying: Is that my very own stomach, no. . .

(me is it not my stomach?)

isn't it my very own stomach which will end up succeeding in thundering?

Colette Thomas had a face full of Greek fire and exclaimed: If that doesn't stop I blow.

Madame Dequeker, the old lady, was in the invisible, like the silvering of a puddle of being which would not succeed in coming

back, with her right hand in the air and her left like an old membrane floating over her abdomen, and saying: I certainly would like my two hands to rejoin without joints, but no joined hands, no, no joined hands.—But how difficult that is, how difficult.

NOTES

Oeuvres completes XIV*, Gallimard, Paris, 1978, pp. 13-22. The text is taken from notebook entries in March, 1946, shortly before Artaud was released from Rodez. It was initially called "Fragments." As he shaped the work, revising it to reflect facets of his "daughters of the heart, to be born," he changed the title to "Fragmentations."

"Yvonne. . .and little Anie:" These "six daughters of the heart, to be born" emerged out of Artaud's regenerative project in Rodez, 1945-1946. Stephen Barber writes:

> These 'daughters' were a highly charged, sexually imbued and manipulable group. Artaud usually imagined six daughters for himself, but he could, when necessary, incorporate other women into the existing children. The daughters combined purely imaginative elements with presences from Artaud's past life. Both of his grandmothers became daughters, as did Cécile Schramme, Yvonne Allendy and Anie Besnard. The daughters fought for him, and suffered terrible tortures in their efforts to reach him at Rodez and free him. Artaud was always certain of their imminent arrival. He wrote to Anie Besnard on 29 October 1945: 'I am awaiting you as arranged, together with your sister Catherine, for whom I no longer have an address, and Cécile, Yvonne and Neneka. You have suffered far too much for anything to stop you and hold you back this time. . .' Around March 1946, he made a drawing entitled 'The theater of cruelty,' which shows four of the daughters in coffins, placed across one another at tangents. Their bodies are scarred and mummified, and they are guarded by an immense, distorted, birdlike creature, but their eyes are open and alert. After his release from Rodez, Artaud wrote to Gilbert Lély, the biographer of the Marquis de Sade, describing the origin of his daughters:
>
> > I thought a lot about love at the asylum of Rodez, and it was there that I dreamed about some daughters of my soul, who loved me like daughters, and not as lovers—me, their prepubescent, lustful, salacious, erotic and incestuous father;
> >
> > and chaste also, so chaste that it makes him dangerous.[1]

Yvonne Allendy was an old friend from the late 1920s. Through her and her husband, the psychiatrist, René Allendy, Artaud met Anaïs Nin in 1933. Yvonne Allendy died in 1935.

Marie Chili (1831-1911) and Catherine Chili (1833-1894), born in Tinos (Cyclades) and Smyrna (Turkey), became Artaud's two grandmothers.

Cécile Schramme is the young Belgian who Artaud became infatuated with in the mid-1930s. She died in a sanitarium in Belgium in 1950.

Ana Corbin is only identifiable as someone, according to Artaud, who worked in the Dreyer film, *la Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.

Anie Besnard, from Luxembourg, was a young friend of Artaud's, whom he met in Paris in the early '30s.

"Ka:" "The ***ka*** was a term for the creative and preserving power of life. In ancient [Egypt] it referred particularly to male potency, hence its phonetic resemblance to the word 'ka' meaning 'bull.' The hieroglyph 'ka' with hands raised in a defensive attitude was a magical gesture designed to preserve the life of the wearer from evil forces. The ***ka*** accompanied a person like a kind of double, but when the person died the ***ka*** lived on."[2]

Elsewhere Artaud spells "ka" as "Kah" or "Kah Kah," punning on "caca." According to Artaud, "ka" as insulin or opium has the power of "caca" without its materiality.

At other points, "ka" is absorbed into longer, apparently coined words ("kaya," "kavina," "dakantala"), which are part of chant constructions.

"tétême:" apparently coined by Artaud; possibly based on "téter" (to suck, as a breast) and "aime" (from "aimer," to love), as well as "t'aime" (I love you). In this passage, "tétême" is quickly linked up with "éma," Artaud's pronunciation of "haimo" (blood, in Greek). "éma" also appears in Artaud's November 17, 1946 letter to Henri Parisot, in a long passage which sheds some light on how Artaud is using it. See Weaver, pp. 476-477.

"té vé:" probably not a reference to TV, but to the Marseillais slang for "bonjour" (good day).

"asses:" Artaud has dropped the "l" from "cul" (ass). We have not attempted to match this in English, as the results lead to unfortunate puns: "as" for "ass," or "but" for "butt."

The last two paragraphs of "Fragmentations" introduce two more women friends, both of whom had recently visited Artaud in Rodez. The scholar Marthe Robert (whose books in English translation include *Franz Kafka's Loneliness* and *The Psychoanalytic Revolution)* performed his texts at the Galerie Pierre readings in 1947. Colette Thomas, an actress married to the novelist Henri Thomas, had a background of mental instability and had already spent time in asylums. She performed "Fragmentations" at a theater benefit for Artaud in 1946.

The doctor Jean Dequeker went to work at Rodez in March, 1945. The warmth that he and his wife, Madeleine, showed toward Artaud made his last year there more endurable.

Readers may find fascinating overlays in Artaud's "daughters of the heart" and the American "outsider artist" Henry Darger's 15,000 page saga, "The Story of the Vivian Girls in what is known as The Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeo-Angelinnean War storm, caused by the Child Slave Rebellion." Written out over the lifetime of this reclusive Chicago artist (who worked as a hospital custodian), Darger's cosmic tale, filled with unusual grammar, rhythmic repetitions, and neologisms, portrays its seven virtuous princesses as innocent, helpless, heroines, fighting adult manipulation and violence. Like Artaud's "daughters," the Vivian Girls are repeatedly captured, tortured, and sentenced to death. John M. MacGregor writes: "Darger's personal experience of little girls was limited. In his drawings of them, tracings from published sources, girls are frequently shown naked and usually with male genitals, which he carefully added."[3]

1 Barber, p. 116.
2 *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt,* Manfred Lurker, Thames & Hudson, 1984, p. 73.
3 "I see a World within the World: I Dream but am Awake," John M. MacGregor, in *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art,* Princeton, 1992, pp. 259-270.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

TWO POEMS

PAIN

as a name to call the poem by

this is the fact of life this rises
every time we move
this is the burden of the killers

see how they walk around
they find a pleasure in it

because what nature gives
isn't enough
the task of life is its enlargement

enlightenment is also pain

as love is

PROLOGOMENA TO A POETICS

for Michael McClure

. . . . . .

Poet man walks between dreams
He is alive, he is breathing freely
thru a soft tube like a hookah.
Ashes fall around him as he walks
singing above them.
Oh how green
the sun is where it marks
the ocean.
Feathers drift atop the hills
down which the poet man
keeps walking, walking
a step ahead of what he fears,
of what he loves.

. . . . . .

Why has the poet failed us?
Why have we waited, waited for the word to come again?
Why did we remember what the name means
only to now forget it?
If the poet's name is god how dark the day is
how heavy the burden is he carries with him.
All poets are jews, said Tsvetayeva.
The god of the jews is jewish, said a jew.
It was white around him & his voice
was heavy,
like a poet's voice in winter,
old & heavy,
crackling,
remembering frozen oceans in a summer clime,
how contrary he felt
how harsh the suffering was in him,
let it go!
The poet is dreaming about a poet
& calls out.
Soon he will have forgotten who he is.

. . . . . .

Speak to the poet's mother,
she is dead now.
So many years ago she left her father's clime.
His *father* too.
The tale of wandering is still untold,
untrue. The tale of who you are,
the tale of where the poem can take us,
of where it stops
& where the voice stops.
The poem is an argument with death.
The poem is priceless.
Those who are brought into the poem can never leave it.
In a silver tux the poet in the poem by Lorca
walks down the hall to greet the poet's bride.
The poet sees her breasts shine in the mirror.
Apples as white as boobs,
says Lorca.
He is fed the milk of paradise,
the dream of every poet man
of every poet bride.
The band plays up
the day unstops & rushes out to greet
another night.

. . . . . .

Is the black poet
black?
And is the creation of his hands & throat
a black creation?
Yes, says the poet man
who wears three rings,
the poet man who seeks the precious light,
passes the day beside a broken door
no one can enter. Hold it shut,
the god cries & the jew rolls over
in his endless sleep.
Gods like little wheels glide past him

down the mountain road where cats live
in a cemetery guarded by his father's star,
a poet & a bride entangled in the grass,
his hands are black
his eyes the whitest white
& rimmed with scarlet.
Hear the drumbeat,
heart.
The blacks have landed on the western shore
the long lost past of poetry revives.

. . . . . .

Our fingers fail us.

Then tear them off! the poet cries
not for the first time.
The dead are too often seen filling our streets,
who hasn't seen them?
A tremor across the lower body,
always the image of a horse's head
& sandflies.
A woman's breast & honey.
She in whose mouth the murderers stuffed gravel
who will no longer speak.
The poet is the only witness to that death,
writes every line
as though the only witness.

MICHAEL MCCLURE

DARK MEAT 2

for Jerome Rothenberg

I REMEMBER
MYSELF
REMEMBERING
before
there
was
MEMORY

memory
in
gold

memory
in
silver

memory
in
sulfur

memory
in
lions

memory
in
shark faces

•

REMEMBERING
REMEMBERING

before
memory

before
material
PRODUCTS

give forth
of themselves

as
centers
of
consciousness

in
the

hunger
obliterating

BEING

before

remembering
remembering
memory

•

Like
a high top
BLACK SHOE

with
new rubber
sole

a
small town
swimming pool

three stars
in the belt
of
Orion

jet engines

reforming endlessly

remembering

being

on
the
edge
(solid)
a smell of it

•

DIGNITY

PATRIOTISM

shoe
polish

quasars

novae

a finger
touching the wet
leafy
trail

a flicker's call

the same
MEMORY

remembering

reaching past

the magic beings
fucking
in the retort

•

A
PAPER
BOAT

on
a quicksilver
sea

THE

SAME

AT

ONE

STRETCH

FOR

THE

ORIGIN
OF

THE
PRECIPICE

—LIKE

A FOOL
WITH A JUMPING
DOG

BITING
HIS
ASS

•

The origin
of the precipice

BE
FORE

Nature locked
into space

and I
dressed
in these rags

colored rags
that I am

ZERO

ON THE OTHER

SIDE

ZERO
HERE

ZERO
ZERO
ZERO
between

remembering
remembering

till
cinders

ARE
WHAT

is

built out of
cinders
of
ZERO
remembering

Oakland Hills—Tokyo

CHARLES WATTS

from THE RECOVERY OF THE PUBLIC WORLD: A CONFERENCE IN HONOR OF ROBIN BLASER'S POETRY AND POETICS

FOREWORD

Poets have repeatedly in this century turned philosophers, so to speak, in order to argue the value of poetry and its practice within the disturbed meanings of our time. These arguments are fascinating because they have everything to do with the poets' sense of reality in which imagery is entangled with thought. Often, they reflect Pound's sense of 'make it new' or the modernist notion that this century and its art are simultaneously the end of something and the beginning of something else, a new consciousness, and so forth. It is not one argument or another for or against tradition, nor is it the complex renewal of the imaginary which our arts witness, for, as I take it, the enlightened mind does not undervalue the imaginary, which is the most striking matter of these poetics; what is laid out before us finally is the fundamental struggle for the nature of the real. And this, in my view, is a spiritual struggle, both philosophical and poetic. Old spiritual forms, along with positivisms and materialisms, which 'held' the real together have come loose. This is a cliché of our recognitions and condition. But we need only look at the energy of the struggle in philosophy and poetry to make it alive and central to our private and public lives.

—Robin Blaser, from "The Violets:
Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead"

These words came to set the tone for "The Recovery of the Public World: a Conference and Festival in Honor of Robin Blaser, his Poetry and Poetics," which took place this past June 1st through 4th at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada. Those of us who organized the conference found in Robin's words a sense of urgency to imagine a community in which "the struggle in philosophy and poetry" is "central to our private and public lives." Many people felt that sense of urgency: fifty-five panelists on eight panels made presentations to some

200 persons over four days; fifty-eight poets spoke, read their poetry and performed at mid-afternoons and evenings, on two evenings before an audience of four hundred. Jenny Penberthy and I, Daphne Marlatt and Phyllis Webb, Norma Cole and Michael Palmer, Susan Howe and Nathaniel Mackey, Lisa Robertson and Jery Zaslove, Charles Bernstein and Miriam Nichols, Bruce Boone and Sharon Thesen, and Pauline Butling and Wystan Curnow co-chaired the panels, titled "Companions: Self, Other, Community;" "Composition & Performance;" "Translation & Poetry;" "Heterologies;" " Ethics & Aesthetics;" "Poetics: Theory & Practice;" "Eros & Poiesis;" and "Poetics: Form & Structure." The speakers who appeared on these panels: Michael Boughn, Daniel Burgoyne, Clayton Eshleman, Peter Gizzi, Michael McClure, Kristin Prevallet, Nathaniel Tarn, David Bromige, Peter Middleton, Jed Rasula, David Sullivan, Phyllis Webb, Colin Browne, Hilary Clark, Pierre Joris, Susan Vanderborg, Pasquale Verdicchio, Steve Dickison, Michele Leggott, D.S. Marriott, Leslie Scalapino, Andrew Schelling, Michael Davidson, Robert Hullot-Kentor, Paul Kelley, Andrew Klobucar, David Levi Strauss, Anne Waldman, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Alan Golding, Steve McCaffery, Tom Marshall, Miriam Nichols, Kevin Killian, Daphne Marlatt, Peter Quartermain, George Stanley, Alan Vardy, Charles Altieri, Pauline Butling, Don Byrd, Norman Finkelstein.

I believe this conference will have some lasting importance, for many reasons. It's the very first occasion to present diverse examination and celebration of Robin Blaser's life work in poetry. It brought poets and scholars together from Canada, the United States, England and New Zealand, all of them interested in the poetic, philosophical, political and ethical concerns that make for the ground of Robin's work. It allowed these writers, from at least four very distinctly different literary homelands, to meet each other, on the public stage, in panels and readings, and in the "in-betweens"—the breaks, the informal moments at lunch or dinner around Granville Island or elsewhere in Vancouver. And again and again, it made a forum for speaking of a poetic practice which is not simply personal, but which takes account of the generally felt need for a public world in which these poetics and politics would be recognized. Several speakers, including Robin, recalled Hannah Arendt's words (the phrase "the recovery of the public world" is Hannah Arendt's) from her book, *The Human Condition*, about the crucial effect of a public world in organizing and drawing people together: *"to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [and women] at the same time."* Arendt continues: *"The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to*

bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost the power to gather them together, to relate and separate them."

This, I think, is the urgency which Robin feels and which, embodied in his work, moved so many poets and scholars to come to Vancouver this past June: how to come to terms with (and against) the "conditionless condition" that characterizes the common predicament of the mass societies in which we live. As we know, since we live in it, it is a highly impervious predicament, not likely, or even very temporarily, amenable of solution. But speaking, writing, working out a poetics like Robin's, which is both furious and intelligent, compassionate and amiable and active in its imagination, offers to many of us a means of resistance to that "conditionless condition." Resistance: another word often heard at the "Recovery of the Public World" conference. And among the many resources spoken of as means to this resistance, wit and humor shone through as beacons.

The three pieces printed here—Jed Rasula's "Taking Out the Tracks: Robin Blaser's Syncopation" (presented on the Composition & Performance panel), Peter Quartermain's "The Mind as Frying Pan: Blaser's Humor" (given as part of the Eros & Poiesis panel), and Robin Blaser's talk, presented on the opening evening of the conference—all share those qualities: wit and humor as elegant forms of serious resistance in "the struggle in philosophy and poetry."

I won't speak of the papers themselves—each speaks for itself most sufficiently. They are not, nor do they pretend to be, representative of the whole of the papers given at the conference: each is itself, distinct. That said, it's still worth noting the frequency with which some themes—I've alluded to some of them here—and some authors—Arendt, for instance, Montaigne, Emerson, Leibniz, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Avital Ronell, Jean Luc Nancy, Catherine Clément—were raised, by diverse presenters in papers with very different subject matter. This consonance of thinking struck many at the conference: there was some actual common effort, some syncretism of thought, spontaneously and heuristically arrived at, to imagine a common and public world, or to came to terms with—that is, to name—the one in which we live.

One thing more: We, the organizers of "The Recovery of the Public World," plan to gather these and other papers from the conference together in a book that will, we hope and intend, reflect the spirit and the quality of the thought that made this conference such an occasion for poetics. We intend that this book will be published and available in Canada and the United States, New Zealand and England, and that it will be available by the Fall of 1996.

Vancouver, July, 1995

ROBIN BLASER

HELLO!

First, let me recommend sticking around for 70 years—if you get the chance—I won't stop over the increasing upkeep or the necessary tune-ups—in fact, I'd like to hang out with you in the year 2000—as I've said in a poem, to see what three zeros look like—and to listen to the musical airs of apocalypses—twentieth-century music is not at all difficult, if you think of the dissonance and percussion of *Daniel* and *The Book of Revelation*—so, stick around, all sorts of things happen, including, in this instance of our being here, that one's destiny in writing becomes curiouser and curiouser—

that is, for me, a marvelousness—the great paradigms of our meanings shift—"God, self, history, and Book," to use Mark C. Taylor's arrangement of them, shift—that is to say, in the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the word *shift*, **divide and separate**—and thus, because they are never still, they meander, like persons who have come upon a territory—"Map is not territory," in a phrase that delighted Jack Spicer and me, when we found it something like 45 years ago in Alfred Korzybski—and equally, territory is not a Map—

this will not be a lecture, even though the program for this Conference says it is—I'll forgo the meticulousness expected of lecturers—what an interesting word meticulous is, coming, as it does, from the Latin *metus*, meaning *fear*—nevertheless, I'll step carefully for a few minutes, reading signposts and street signs—and convoking some companions in thought, with whom I would keep company—

my first thought was to improvise a wild and extravagant piece made up of immediately memorable phrases by Jack Clarke, Alvin Balkin, Robert Duncan, Rob Dunham, Roy Kiyooka, bp Nichol, Jack Spicer, Warren Tallman, and Dennis Wheeler—to whose memory this occasion is dedicated—as it is with real alphabets, none of us knew them in that alphabetical order—my ambition in this remains a mere ambition, interrupted by what may be a superstition—I think they all got together and agreed, "He won't get away with that!" and sent me an abscessed tooth, from which I 'm speaking to you this evening—so, this is, in fact, a serration—I am indebted to their lives and their work—

let me lip-sync, because I believe them, a few words from Octavio Paz's *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism:*

> To me, poetry and thought are a system of communicating vessels. The source of both is my life. I write about what I have lived and am living. To live is also to think, and sometimes to cross that border beyond which feeling and thinking become one: poetry—

such is the territory, one life after another, for which there is no Map, but there is a celebration—

so, speaking of the company I would keep, there is this extraordinary gathering—of poetic minds—and of those wonderful adventurers I call readers—this companionship—including the magical, passionate dissonances and differences among us—of companionable, musical language and of our stake in it—the word from Latin *com-panis*—with-bread—designates those who share bread—here we would share language—for our difficult purposes—as much a requirement of the body as bread is—companions may become "framed windows over a hatchway" or a hooded staircase on board a ship, embarking or disembarking—even a *camera della campagna,* a storeroom for provisions, a caboose—what I love about poetry is the astonishment of language—its surprising abilities—that poetry guards the materiality of language—its workability—its careful steps—as syntax changes, as it must, as paradises must—I am honored and proud to be among you—who, I would say, compose by counterpoint, or so I read you, and are, thus, mindful of how harmony was discovered and of what wore out—in grammar and in syntax—

we are not a school, an organized movement, a cabal, a power or a domination—as your reader, you strike me as eminently qualified for posting in the College we imagined in San Francisco during the early '60s—before Simon Fraser University generously invited me here—we called it White Rabbit College—Robert Duncan was to teach *Godlore;* Jack Spicer, Anglo-Saxon and Poetry & Politics; Pauline Olivares, music with spoons and kettles—she was then known, in newspaper jargon, as the composer of "uglies"; I was to teach French and the History of Troy—both Robert and Jack have left their chairs to others—and I have since met those who could far better teach my subjects than I—I step aside—so there are chairs & chairs—White Rabbit College requires many Alices—or at least persons with Alice's marvelous courage—

perhaps, a story would fit us here just now—it has been told to me twice over, so to speak—and since I'm telling it a third time, it must, perforce, be true:

> How strange a thing this Art of Writing did seem at its first Invention, we may guess by the late discovered Americans, who were amazed to see Men converse with Books, and could scarce make themselves to believe a Paper could speak. . . .
>
> There is a pretty Relation to this Purpose, concerning an Indian Slave; who being sent by his Master with a Basket of Figs and a Letter, did by the Way eat up a great Part of his Carriage, conveying the Remainder unto the Person to whom he was directed; who when he had read the Letter, and not finding the Quantity of Figs answerable to what was spoken of, he accuses the Slave of eating them, telling him what the Letter said against him. But the Indian (not withstanding this Proof) did confidently abjure the Fact, cursing the Paper, as being a false and lying Witness.
>
> After this, being sent again with the like Carriage, and a Letter expressing the just Number of Figs, that were to be delivered, he did again, according to his former Practice, devour a great Part of them by the Way; but before meddled with any, (to prevent all following Accusations) he first took the Letter, and hid that under a great Stone, assuring himself, that if it did not see him eating the Figs, it could never tell of him; but being now more strongly accused than before, he confesses the Fault, admiring the Divinity of the Paper, and for the future does promise his best Fidelity in every Employment. (John Wilkins, *Mercury; or, The Secret and Swift Messenger,* 1641, cited in Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation.)*

Ah! this "Divinity of the Paper"—two hundred and forty years later, it will have a different feel to it—something "like a zigzag doodle drawn on paper by a superior power wanting to try out a *newpen*"(Nietzsche to Peter Gast, August, 1881)—as for "Fidelity in every Employment," three hundred and fifty-four years later—today—we are in the midst of a regression toward that "first Invention," in which, as I've said in a poem, economics and religion join—"confused science and confused theology prancing around together as usual"—

now this surprising festival—we might initially stumble over the title of it—*The Recovery of the Public World*—as if, following discussion, such an eventuality could be announced tomorrow—there are those whose grasp on reality is so grasping that they do not know that there is little or no community left in the public sphere—televised excitements, interrupted by an increasing percentage of minutes per hour of commercials; vicious mental vices of religions; techno-futures; a capitalism that claims something called the "private sector"—these are rather more divisive than commu-

nal—fascinating surfaces, admittedly—potentially undemocratic by probability—the public world has everything and everywhere to do with the traceries and delicacies of public and private existence—the depths beneath the surfaces in which each "simple, separate person" swims—the rhythmic relationships—so, a recovery, a discovery—a lid off a boiling pot—in which one notices that the surface is violent—

the phrase *The Recovery of the Public World* is meant to call Hannah Arendt to mind—I found it in her work and I continue to work alongside her, as best I can, as if she were a Muse—among Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia, and Urania, whose mother, we know, is Mnemosyne—lovely persons of the mind's activity—one may add Musers as one meets them—Hannah Arendt will not lead us into community, as if her work were a map—hers is a useful and profound diagnosis—in which, as in the work of Martha Nussbaum, poetic thought is fundamental—a test of thought's companionship—the public and the private are not true dualisms, as we seem to think—neither are sugar and salt—the condition I try to think about issues from the dynamics of the public and private—it is what is between them—that is to say, what we share—not by metaphysical appointment—but by our existence in thought and feeling—

Hannah Arendt argued that the purpose of political organization is to solve the problems of "large numbers"—the people—food, shelter, clothing, and health—thus, to release human nature into its intelligence—in the public forum—where the conversation of thought might take place with consequences—this is not elitism—that curious word that these days is changing its meaning to say something like "my energies don't go in that direction, so your energy isn't worth shit in this *public space, which I own*"—one might ask such accusers what in the hell they mean in terms of human consciousness, historical and quotidian, as it is—of course, their argument is for *sameness*—another word for the State, Hegelian and otherwise, or reified immortalities—whereas our study is of multiplicity and differences which we share—in my own terms, that is what we actually share, given a sense of "social justice," which frees us from necessity—into human intelligence—the mind's play and the body's extension into relations among things—an indeterminate, various, resistant finitude—

I first came upon Hannah Arendt when she was for a brief time at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1949—our first conversation turned unfortunate—I was trying to help her through a turnstile, which gadget she'd never seen before—and she wound up sitting on top of it—her legacy from that time is, of course, in her books—in the 1950 "Preface" to *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* she wrote:

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are in vain.

I have taken this as admonition and instruction since I first read it in 1951—though it was a long time before I knew what to do with it—this sense that a poetic practice of any consequence would be implicated in our cultural condition—by way of resistance and by some thoughtful clarity about what is irreparable—

I first wrote about my desire for community—little more—in an address I gave in 1968, at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco—"The Fire."—in 1988, I took up "The Recovery of the Public World" for a think-tank at the Humanities Institute, University of Calgary—this essay was published in a volume titled *Reflections on Cultural Policy, Past, Present, and Future*—since my essay seems not to have escaped the formidable weight of that title—at least, not so that it reached many poets—I will, for this occasion, return to some of its concerns—my working title is, as I've said, taken from Hannah Arendt, whose lifelong meditation on the vital relation between public and private worlds for men and women—a fundamental happiness, if truly alive—informs my own—her work begins with a major effort to understand the totalitarianism that dogs the political, social, and artistic life of the twentieth century and of our modernity—in that same 1950 "Preface" to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—a date close to the one usually assigned to the beginning of the postmodern condition—she reminds us:

> Two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor, have ended in the anticipation of a Third World War between the two remaining world powers. [For us today, these two have become several.] This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died. We no longer hope for an eventual restoration of the old order with all its traditions, or for the reintegration of the masses of five continents who have been thrown into a chaos produced by the violence of wars and revolutions and the growing decay

> of all that has still been spared. . .homelessness of an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth—

she argues that we deal with an unpredictable future, with "forces that look like sheer insanity," and with "those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives"—today we watch homelessness increase in the cities we know best and love most—today, we quarrel or try to argue with the powerlessness that breeds violence and corrupt religions in order to "solve" the meaninglessness of the public sphere—the public and the private have not been in conversation for a very long time—

it has been suggested by some critics of Hannah Arendt's work that the whole of it is caught—implying an important limitation—in her personal experience of European Nazism, as if our North American cultural condition with all its differences, whether we think of Canada or the United States, were not embedded in the common European and Christian fate—this reduction of Arendt's world-experience to the merely personal is, of course, silly—and it results from a darkling perception of the place of individual experience within cultural conditions—or, perhaps, it is simply a North American characteristic grown out of the circumstance that one's homestead has not been directly touched by war and twentieth-century revolution—yet wars and revolutions tattoo our modernity—cultural condition is not a picket fence or a nearby Safeway—cultural condition always approaches what we mean by the word *world*—or the process of composing one—the world is never separately—by simplicity's trick—social, political, artistic, or sacred—rather, it is made up of an entanglement of discourses having to do with men, women, earth, and heaven—religions have long won hearts—from the beginning, one might say, when cities were first built for the gods—because they sing of earth and heaven and of many different desires, called immortalities—the largeness to which we respond in the world should not be underestimated—nor should we forget the ricketiness of the circles that the cultural condition draws around largeness—death is the boundary of all our thought, and such a bounded condition is worth the thought given it everywhere—inside and outside religions—but religion must not be allowed to cover over, invade, or delimit the social, political, and artistic discourses of our condition—they, like certain historicisms, make the future a superstition—relation to the Other—in fact to any other—is multidimensional and multi-logical—so my experience tells me—history is an extraordinary Other of ourselves—in relation to the individual and to present social reality—yet it is our own activity in the world, helpless or not—not God's or Providence's—and therein we have responsibility according to our talents—each separate discourse, social, political, religious, artistic, even scientific, has a tendency toward a realism that is its own—which says this is all of it—thus the world

is maimed—thinking and feeling are irreclaimably individual whereby a woman or a man repeatedly falls out of any group or commonality into a solitude—that may be wondrous, banal, or defeated—according, I believe, to one's sense of the world—"civilization is an individual task"—to which nation, state, or social body do not finally answer—

the contemporary humanism that troubles me, whether in the guise of God, Man, or Woman, lacks a world—the shape that that lack takes still reflects these fashionings of wholeness—the "ruler," a "moral energy," an "ultimate philosophical principle"—each of which has a history of its dangerous propensity and then repeats itself—these crowd-pleasers—these systems—suddenly, I think of David Hume's remarks in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1740):

> Fain wou'd I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but
> I cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. . . .
> I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems. . . .

his point, I think, is the self-deception of such systems—

"the subterranean stream of Western history"—we are currently faced with the vicious—and in any terms that wish to know what it was all about in the first place—the blasphemous resurgencies of religions—their willfulness—their manipulations—their infallibilities—in this, the community of shared existence disappears in a *Totality* that is very careless of our finitude—they were still burning at the stake in the 18th century—the Southern Baptists apologize to blacks for what was previously said to be God's Word—the Roman Catholics apologize to Galileo, who was, doubtless, absolutely furious—they have become one and the same *forgiveness of themselves*—these surfaces—atheism in the old sense is of no help in this—it is only the same thing by negation—perhaps, we could take a hint from Jean-Luc Nancy, via his thought on "Shattered Love" and "Of Divine Places"—we might move through a territory we could name "God/noGod"—perhaps, to find what divine writing is—

(I quote a poem by the great twentieth-century Greek poet George Seferis—diddling the translation a little—

> As pines
> keep the shape of the wind
> even when the wind has fled and is no longer there
> so words
> guard the shape of men and women
> even when women and men have fled and are no longer
> [there)

I think with Hannah Arendt again:

> . . .the term "public" signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men [and women] and the condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together; to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men [and women] at the same time.
>
> The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved. . .but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to relate and separate them.
>
> *(The Human Condition,* p. 48)

I've spent the last couple of years working entirely on this desire for community—mulling over its multiformity—to write with a community, so represented here—answering to Jean-Luc Nancy's "Imperative" that *"we must continue to write the community"*—that mysterious language that writes at the edge—even over the edge—of grasping discourses—where something of shared existence is working and "unworking" (Pierre Joris's translation of *désoeuvrement)*—in this territory, which I can, for my part, only write piece by piece—and always somehow unready—in this territory, I've called upon Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowble Community* (Pierre Joris's helpful, elegant translation)—on Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*—on Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*—and on Avital Ronell's *Finitude's Score*—

I'll close my remarks tonight with brief quotations from them—teasers—since they tease my thought and care with what I have called territory—this "thinking without bannisters"—Blanchot:

> . . .the possibility or impossibility of a community at a time when even the ability to understand community seems to have been lost. . . .p. [3]

Nancy:

> If the political is not dissolved in the sociotechnical element of forces and needs (in which, in effect, it seems to be dissolving under our eyes), it must inscribe the sharing of community. The outline of singularity would be "political"—as would be the outline of its communication and its ecstasy. "Political" would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain to such a signification of the "political". . . implies being already engaged in community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself. (pp. 40-41)
>
> . . . .
>
> "Literary communism" indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word *achever*—which can also mean "finish off"), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of "literature," the inscription of our infinite resistance. (pp. 80-81)
>
> . . . .
>
> One thing at least is clear: if we do not face up to such questions, the political will soon desert us completely, if it has not already done so. It will abandon us to political and technological economies, if it has not already done so. And this will be the end of our communities, if this has not yet come about. Being-*in*-common will nonetheless never cease to resist, but its resistance will belong decidedly to another world entirely. Our world, as far as politics is concerned, will be a desert, and we will wither away without a tomb—which is to say, without community, deprived of our finite existence. ("Preface" p. xli)

Ronell:

> As the millennium comes to an end, and the twentieth century scarifies our fragile memory, very little will stand out in terms

of epochal splendor. If anything, humanity will have exhausted the heroic mythemes on which so much has been staked. Humanity (a term which acquired the prestige of its contemporary usage at the Nuremberg trials) will certainly have to rethink the projects and projections that have, despite everything, traced out a history of indecency—a history which compromises the very possibility of a thinking of futurity. In its fading moments, even as it signals change, the last century will have been dominated in the end by a diction of deficit: deficiency, whether immuno or projected outwardly and marked by complementary economies, no longer carries the bounce of lack or the sure fire of nihilism but says, more simply, that we have been depleted. This depletion has to do with a relation to the outside—a *national* deficit, for example—but it also controls a low-energy intensity that involves everyone. It seems as though all accounts of savings and saviors are understood to be depleted. Exhausted with the failure of models, identities, leaders, promise, so-called breakthroughs, vampirized by figures of exigency or ecstasy, the last century sees itself as standing out, if only in the sense that there is an outstanding debt to be paid—but to whom? to what?

In case you're thinking, Well, Avital, fuck her, she just lives inside her own head, this work reveals a growing concern over the finite figures that comprise our shared experience. As long as there is something like experience, it is not entirely mine. Nonetheless, if there is a growing sense that the writer is inhabiting an inside that is out of it, this condition cannot simply be debited to the account of the solitary worker but is rather a symptom pointing to *the vanishing of the experienceability of the world*—assuming that, after all is said and done, one can still say 'world.' (p. ix)

Agamben:

The human is the being that, bumping into things and only in this encounter, open up to the non-thinglike. And inversely, the human is the one that, being open to the non-thinglike, is, for this very reason, irreparably consigned to things.

Non-thingness (spirituality) means losing oneself in things, losing oneself to the point of not being able to conceive of anything but things, and only then, in the experience of the

> irremediable thingness of the world, bumping into a limit, touching it. (This is the meaning of the word "exposure.") (p. 102, 103)

may I say that one's finitude—one's singularity—is offered to the imagination of an infinite limit?—

June 1, 1995

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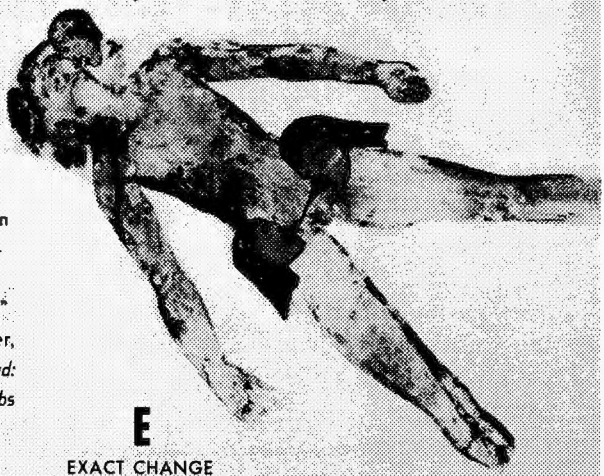

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JED RASULA

TAKING OUT THE TRACKS: ROBIN BLASER'S SYNCOPATION

> The queen of rhythm, syncope, is also the mother of *dissonance*; it is the source, in short, of a harmonious and productive discord. The process allows some limping before the harmony, however: it is sometimes said that syncope "attacks" the weak beat, like an enzyme, a wildcat, or a virus; and yet the last beat is the saving one. Attack and haven, collision; a fragment of the beat disappears, and of this disappearance, rhythm is born. (Clément, 5)

Robin Blaser has long incorporated these interruptions as a rapture of his work. The syncope, its syncopation, is the danger of letting in some arrhythmia, some inspiring fatality (*duende* resounds here), and the trick is to survive this creative prostration. To make of its arrest a restorative bewilderment (and I hear *arrest* here as the final word of Robert Duncan's last poem, as well as Clayton Eshleman's *Under World Arrest)*. Arrested: somehow spasm back into play.

The spasm concurs with the "randonée" or sporadic syncopation of the hunt, the sudden natality of spoor. Eruptive sigillation.[1] When these things occur, we become part of the place, pieces of The Place, a place-meant, in which the disabling de-composition composes itself. To simultaneously say and unsay; to find in citation a site, a place to work *in audition*. Audaciously, the music of Monteverdi, in one poem, is recognized as "an achievement at the turn / of the next room" (HF 211). Common sense says Monteverdi was a 16th century composer, so how could his "achievement" be located in a house in Vancouver in the 20th century? But the experiences we have are real to us. When Walter Benjamin laments the decline of the aura he overlooks the recombinant prospect; so the mechanical reproduction of Monteverdi, lacking a cathedral, is given the chance to grow a new aura in a place where "the december tomatoes shine on the top of the refrigerator," where *also* "the *shattered marble* of my unwalled / thought enters the Rondanini Pietá / silently—*shaking hands of the substance / melt away*" (HF 211). A fluid interpenetration of distinct spaces and discrete

modes of being, joined by syncopation's stutter, sutured in tantalizing indiscretion.

This is why Aristotle subordinated history to poetry. History is the record of what happened only once, he said, but poetry is what happens all the time. Our thoughts and wishes do penetrate silently the objects of our desires; we *do* couple with the phantasm. It's simple, *sim-plex,* "once pleated" or folded over as Giorgio Agamben has it in *Stanzas* (156).

Blaser offers a parable about such occasions: Opal Whiteley has a cow called Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "Her mooings now are very musical, and there is poetry in her tracks. She does make such dainty ones. When they dry up in the lane, I dig up her tracks, and I save them. There is much poetry in them. . ." (HF 204) Tracks make a plausible double for writing. Both are traces of a passage. Opal Whiteley saves cow tracks; Robin Blaser salvages tracks of others' writing. Writing as tracking:

> The work is always the passage of a wildness. The suddenness of the man I watch is both visible and invisibly continuous. At an edge. (SM 55)
> . . .The whole culture has brought him there at the edge of himself. (SM 56)
> I speak entering what is speaking—at an edge. I enter many directions, the synchron or coming together of time, in order to find words which are not alone. (SM 56)

To quote is to create company around the words, to convene companionship ("break bread" in an etymology Blaser delights in) there at the edge, the flicker. To incubate the words. Blaser's poems are ventilators as well as incubators, choreographed to make of space a syncopation. These are the nests of syncope.

To nourish words as eggs, to take them as fragmentary aspirations to growth, morphogenesis. The poetics of the palimpsest: inklings from the dream world in the poem dated 6 November 1982:

> so.....prize
> .....
> .....
> surprise
> (HF 216)

This is the look of the incubator, ellipses or dots as rows and rows of embryos punning their way into life.

People started to take an interest in fragments in the 18th century, initially as part of the development of the historical sense. So much of

antiquity is fragmentary, like Heraclitus and Sappho. The vogue for ruins became an architectural fad. The German Romantics in the Jena circle (Hölderlin, the brothers Schlegel, Novalis, Schelling), were interested in fragments: "as a fragment, the incomplete appears in its most bearable form" (Novalis, in Seyhan 72). They recognized that conversation, the discursive Socratic exchange, is "a chain or garland of fragments" *(Athenaeum* #77). A voice is significant not as expression of a self, but as a momentary attribute of a growing form, the verge when the conversation folds back on itself en route to another voice.

> the voice is recognizable
> as fragments
> of a greater language,
> a live and changing
> face
> (HF 116)

A fragment is not only ruin or wreckage, but the trace of a passage, the sign of where some creative force has moved on, leaving in its way a decomposition with new tracks through it.

> 'If there's one thing Harry learned
> to love more than the sacred, it was
> the sacred in ruins.' (Epitaphics, HF 261)

The process of ruin is reflected in what I take to be a typo in "The Stadium of the Mirror": "The wreckage of prenouns [sic?] is a great deal of fun" (SM 57). The error is an invention. Blaser quotes Hölderlin's translator: "the modern imagination invents itself (and thereby reinvents antiquity) out of the evidence of wreckage,. . .for to scrutinize a fragment is to move from the presence of a part to the absence of the whole, to seize upon the sign as a witness of something that is forever elsewhere. . ." (HF 299).

The god of fragments might be the two-faced god, Janus. Watcher of partitions; presiding over transits; guardian of exits and entrances, internal and external, above and below, before and after.[2] Janus might also be a patron of collage, that kinship system of debris. But it's too easy to get distracted by the modernity of collage: we need to reflect on the historical foreground of the fragment, like the fact that the respect accorded the fragment in the 18th century challenged the classical criteria of formal unity. The vogue for Chinoiserie and the Islamic design sense—from which the word "arabesque" derives—suggests an aesthetic apprehension of fragments of the culturally strange, the principles of unity of which are inscrutable but, it turned out, no impediment to appreciation of them as

fragments, or as the objects corresponding to a fragmentary understanding. A fragment is a question (suggested to me by the proximity of the German words *Frage* and *Fragment).* And, for Blaser (as Valéry said of Leonardo), "His desire to probe utterly the slightest fragment, the merest shard, of the world renews the force and cohesion of his being" ("Method," 36).

There is another 18th century reconfiguration having to do with "nature." Where nature had formerly signified grand design, the fledgling sciences of mineralogy, geology, and volcanism discovered the earth itself to be a protean challenge to Vitruvian and Pythagorean harmonies. The book of nature, *liber naturae,* turned out to be *libertine,* busily composing a secret perishable script, "stammering the illimitable dialects of an incessantly fabricating earth" (Stafford, 32). So the fragment, as both natural and cultural species of erasure, marks a transition from signifying form to signifying force.

Once libertine nature is honored for its signifying propensity, and the link is forged between geological and linguistic ruin, it's possible for Henry Thoreau to watch thawing sand on a railway embankment and fancy that he's stumbled into the primal workshop of a natural alphabet ("as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me,—had come to where he was still at work, sporting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about")—to which I hear Blaser's lines (in his poem for bp Nichol "'the universe is part of ourselves'") as illuminating coda:

> the ferns dream as they return
> to green the efformation, the
> dis-creation, the kindness of fragments
> (HF 234)

Ralph Waldo Emerson has a passage about fragments in his essay on "Experience":

> Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface, Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness—these are threads on the loom of time, these are the lords of life. I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way. I know better than to claim any completeness for my picture. I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me.

To be a fragment is to be borne along, as we all are by virtue of being born. At each encounter with one of the lords of life, the figure of Janus, the two-faced god, arises to mark the passage above or below, left or right, in or out. It's Janus to whom Ashbery's line might be pledged: "We get lost in

life, but life knows where we are" *(A Wave,* 16). People complain of Emerson's disorienting prose, his pugnacious pell-mell aphoristic energy. But he's aware of what he does. His work, like Blaser's, moves by implication and explication; folding and unfolding.[3] Emerson is always saying something like *I'm going to help you lose your way, then help you find you never lost it.*

Robin Blaser does not shy away from such perplexing formulations either: in "The Art of Combinations":

> . . .nothing simpler than what I have said because
> I didn't say it, nothing simpler than what
> I have said, because I said it— (HF 258)

Blaser, like Emerson, helps me understand the doctrine of signatures as a gregarious application of the principle of the speaker to the open world of utterance—endless, copious, and common. Commonly lost in finding: uncommonly so.

There is always a saying or telling, oblivious to the speaker's identity. "One may offer another only a world, not oneself" (SM 61). So this is a seismic transaction—there's the rub—a *frictive* certainty.

> I am not whole not one but, as Montaigne
> said in his essay on friendship, divided
> (HF 305)

—fractured, but also ventilated, and syncopated. Division is imminent—and immanent—kinship. Divided, we find a dividend.

All poetry is translation insofar as it takes words from one place and deposits them in another. The language is seamed with striations of a glacial transposition. Poetry names the unaccustomed new surroundings in which transported words find themselves, and are translated out of themselves. A familiar estrangement. An estrangement made even stranger by that other practice of the outside, quotation (and I would append here Paul Valéry's remark that "We should speak of 'the Strange' as we speak of Space and Time" *[Analects,* 291]). What quotation reveals is that, even as the words themselves remain the same, the mind transporting or transposing them changes.

Blaser's most insistent stance is that "It is within language that the world speaks to us with a voice that is not our own" (PO 278), "a speaking that *lodges within my own speech"* (SM 58). This is the operational "duplicity [of] the poetic job"—to credit "a speech along side my speech, which allows a double-speech. A placement" (SM 59). These are figurative propositions that are made literal in *Syntax,* the poaching zone of *The Holy Forest,* the

sanctuary at the heart of Blaser's grand design, a collage portfolio of graffiti (like "Artists are the deodorant pucks in the urinals of life" from the men's room at Leo's Fish House, Gastown [HF 191]). *Syntax* is an apparition of joints and junctures, boundaries and edges, the coordination of discrepancies and dependencies as its title suggests. In the Notes to the first edition of *Image-Nations 1-12* Blaser defines the author as "a composition of bound and unbound, visible-invisible, thought and unthought,—ultimately double" (SM 66). The title "Image-Nations" is not a pun but a hinge, a fold; a recovery and reanimation, of the fragments incubating in the common word.

Blaser's citations fracture, while *egging on,* continuity. Often the only mark of difference is the use of italics. Italics are commonly used for emphasis; so I glean from Blaser's use of italics as quotation marks a sense that the quote is emphatic in its blow to the text. A quote is typological thump, that "universal thump" Ishmael refers to as the whale's gift of the tale in *Moby-Dick.* A force that blows in and bends the letters over like prairie grass. The use of space in his poems is like an exhaling, and the breaths vented through these apertures can be windy. The spaces are oracular crevices. To read the poems too insistently as continuous arguments is to miss or ignore the force of this boreal scattering of the sybilline leaves in the arboreal lens of the Holy Forest. (There is almost a Janus principle of reversal in the lines, making it undecidable whether to read backwards or forwards, up or down.)

Blaser's work is positioned *with care* at that interface of visible and invisible, thought and unthought, original and derivative. Its doubling is conjugal: "Every existence has its idiom, every thing has an idiom and tongue. . .he is the joiner, he sees how they join" (Whitman, "Song of the Answerer," #1).[4] There is a conjugal accent in Blaser's access of others' words—as if the poems were always on the verge of saying "in other words." "I was once another man's heart" he says in *Image-Nation* 9 "(half and half"—paraphrasing Empedocles—and at the *"flowing boundary. . . /* at the point of the heart" is "a continual / division of halves" which produce tantalizing heterogeneous duplications of the Different Same, the "seim anew" as Joyce has it in *Finnegans Wake.* So "language itself can be experience as other" (PP 23).

As introjected remnants—revenants—of the other, words are uncanny. Blaser defines ". . .imagination [as] more a power to take in and hold than it is a power of making up" (F 239). To "take in" is to reposition the world, or its fragments, in that interior pocket or imaginal fold "haunted by a sense of the invisibility of everything that comes into me" (F 235).[5]

The imagination "holds" what can't be held in the hands.

when he lifted up his cup, he let the sky
go free out of his hands
(HF 125)

the words do not end but come back
from the adventure
the body is at the edge
of their commotion
the nonsense
the marvelous clarity
in the pool of the
heart
(HF 113)

In Blaser's poetics of ventilation, attuned to the porousness of boundaries, selfhood is a play of partitions. In the Romantic imagination up to Rimbaud and extending through Surrealism, this was a project of dislocation and self-estrangement; countering the alienation effects of history with a strategic swerve or Lucretian *clinamen*.[6] But Blaser inclined more to Mallarmé, adheres instead to ***kenosis*** or emptying as the primary respiratory thesis of selfhood. The self, in this figuration, is what is empathically released to the world in calculated abandonment, and in this evacuation creates a zero or blank into which the countercurrent washes its tidal offerings.

This is not the New England sensibility of Puritanism in which every citation of self is canceled by a ritual denial of self, in a language which renders the personal pronoun incessant and central; nor D.H. Lawrence's wind-tunnel of the romantic ego verified by inversion ("not I but the wind that blows through me"). "What had been imaginings of the whole. . .now become an imagination of holes" (PP 23)—conduits, which Duncan named Passages. Deliberately leaky buckets; a form of empty readiness. empty mind:

if I think 'I' unifies
I lose,
and the feeling overflows the bucket
if I think the aggregate of large numbers of us,
massified, unifies,
our hunger
unifies without justice
(HF 302)

Splits, pleats, faults, furrows, mouths, pockets. Tracks. Cows make tracks every day. Spontaneously, fortuitously, certain tracks suddenly excite attention and a girl digs them up. This *suddenness* is the aesthetic event, the *pleat* that, as it joins, divides, making many out of one, and "the soul becomes a fracture in the old paint—like the surface of a moonlit Ryder painting—running joyous and jagged—here and there" (HF 365-366); *"a greedy flowering of amorous play"* (HF 369) with *"no entrance, only interpretative delirium, fragments of a language"* (368): in other words, a Holy Forest. Implication, complication, explication: the Neo-Platonic *omnia complicans*,[7] the preparatory congestion of impending blankness.

Blaser's is the art of drawing a blank. It is a deliberate withdrawal from the voluble givens of chatter which would fill in the blanks. His is an art of spacing and release. An unretentive poetics that opens to a different order of attentions. ("And it was from the human mind that even the gods received their gift of *creation*, because that mind, being periodic and abstract, can expand any of its conceptions to the point at which they are no longer conceivable" [Valéry, "Method," 41].) Blaser describes how, "back of the first *Image-Nations* was the old comfort—a discourse which I could have substituted for the holes in intelligence, and thus, have closed the poems inside a formality of what my mind constituted,—an anthropomorphism in tatters" (SM 58). We get instead something moving in the direction of, but not as severe as, Ronald Johnson's poem *RADI OS*, in which he confesses to using Milton's text (Paradise Lost), but says that he composed the holes.

But Blaser's porosities are not holier than thou: "the word soul what a haughty standing alone that is" (HF 129). It is an art of humility—from *humus*, close to earth, grounded. Llewelyn Powys reports his brother John (author of *Wolf Solent* and *Glastonbury Romance)* saying people "are no better equipped for comprehending the unfathomable mysteries that surround us than is a tadpole in that dew-pond of envisaging earth-life from the squinnying glimpse it gets of the animal's cloven hoof" *(Swiss Essays,* 73). Let's go back in conclusion to the cloven view.

Think again of Opal Whiteley's tracks, those portable tracks. Those tracks are signs of her cow, hapless designs of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's hooves pressed into wet soil. For Opal they are medallions, icons, which is why she collects them and shelters them in the kitchen drawer. She can see her cow in the tracks; which is to say, her tracks are lenses. They magnify the cow insofar as they're separable from the cow. To cut off a bit of cowhide, or a few hairs from the tail, would mean being satisfied with a mere indexical relation. Opal's tracks are far more circuitous, devious, extravagant: her cow is signified exclusively by something that is *not cow.* But the signification does not stop there. The tracks are not souvenirs. For

her, the numinous quality of the tracks is not that they refer to the cow, but that *her cow referred to the tracks,* as it were, by making them.[8]

The cow's hoof makes a hole in the ground, and Opal removes the hole. In doing so, she leaves a further mark, another hole. "Always a 'matter' of form reopening, like footsteps." (BB 12) The tracks are contagious; they're *symptoms.* In the terms given by the Delphic oracle, the symptom neither speaks nor conceals, but bestows itself as sign, creating a "semantic space. . .excavated by the force of a desire which the mathematician Plato called 'eros', the biologist: Aristotle 'orge', and the Latin Stoics 'libido'" (Baer, 58).[9] A magic word, an enigma (like that given by the Sphinx), the symptom is the *"destiny of full signification,* pregnant thick/sick with meaning" (45). "It produces the form it talks about; it per-forms what it announces, creates the world it presents, does what it says" (60). A symptom is not index or reference, but propagation, explication, invitation.

Robin: thank you for the invitation. R.S.V.P.-Reader So Very Pleased (for work so very pleated).

Notes

1 "Sigillation" is a term I take from Walter Charleton's *Physiologia* (1654), by which he means the natural imprint of signs in objects of nature (Patey, 37). Charleton went on to consider the temporal erosion of such natural sigils, in dismayed consideration of the elusive unity of nature owing to its invariable reversion to entropic illegibility. But this ruination still spelled out the rudiments of a script, for Charleton, an admonitory utterance like the Sybilline leaves or the gnomic pronouncements of the Delphic oracle ("a hole in the wind / it is an alphabetic wind rises. . ." HF 131). In *Chorea Gigantum* (1663, 3rd ed. 1725), he argued that Stonehenge was an ancient monument, linking *monumentum* etymologically to *moneo* and *memoria,* so that this "inanimate remembrancer" served as "admonition by putting in remembrance." The ruin, in Charleton's view, was also a rune. (Walter Benjamin also makes much of this phonetic convergence, ruin/rune, in *Trauerspiel,* his study of German baroque tragedy.)

2 This is an expansive characterization. But Janus is not a deity with a particularly focused iconography. A Latin solar god (although L.A. MacKay argues for a lunar affiliation) with no Hellenistic precedent, Janus was most commonly associated with doorways and beginnings. Macrobius sees his iconic paraphernalia, the scepter and the key, as proof of his solar identity. Vergil traces his duplex nature to his sheltering of Saturn, who purportedly taught him husbandry and monetary calculation, in gratitude for which Janus deeded half his kingdom to Saturn. The 16th century mythographer Natale Conti cites the Plutarchian identification of Janus as god of the double life of humans in transition from barbarity to civility. The *bifrons* feature of Janus has proven the most durable over time. For Pico della Mirandola, the celestial souls "'were signified by the double-headed Janus, because, being supplied like him with eyes in front and behind, they can at the same time see the spiritual things and provide for the material'" (Wind, 201). Edgar Wind, reviewing the Renaissance enigma of the bifold Pan/Proteus, finds a consistently esoteric compound at work in such hermetic conjunctions (quoting W.H. Auden's lines "For through the Janus of a joke / The candid psychopompos spoke" [200]). George Wither, in *Emblems* (1635), regards Janus as the god of mysteries in general, providing the epithet "He that concealèd things will find / Must look before him and behind" (Wind, 230). In 1648 Alexander Ross ventures a curious etymological hinge by which Janus, via Hebrew *jain* [wine] is assimilated to Noah, become god of the two

worlds—before and after the Flood *(Mystagogus Poeticus,* 197). The most ambitious recent evocation is by Arthur Koestler, who uses Janus as the figure for his autopoetic theory of "holons," which are "self-regulating entities which manifest both the independent properties of wholes and the dependent properties of parts" *(Janus,* 34). Janus embodies for Koestler the precarious equilibrium of whole and part, while the holon exemplifies the balance of integration and self-assertion.

3 For instance, in the passage from "Experience" he claims to name the "lords of life" "as I find them in my way." This formulation is itself an elaboration or unfolding of the Latin behind the English word *obvious*—ob-viam, or literally "in the way." On the road.

4 Here, too, we find a residual mark of the Neoplatonic Orphic lineage documented by Edgar Wind, in which Janus is the sign not only of the double but of division or cutting. Wind cites a passage from Philo on the "'Logos as cutter', who produces 'creation by dichotomy' but is the 'joiner of the universe' as well" *(Pagan Mysteries,* 202).

5 "I wish to let the reader loose in the invisibility where the text leads him. He is after all a perception of the text. He may find himself inside a distaste or disgust. He may be terrified to find himself an image of the action of a world-text where he is dispossessed" (SM 57).

6 My contrast here of Lucretius and Mallarmé is a momentary sophistry, Lucretius being of course an agent of Democritan and Epicurean atomism which admitted a void or *boundlessness* which, in turn, posited an infinity of worlds. This is not the occasion for adumbrating the various accounts of a fecund blankness (which would need to include Peirce and Heidegger, not to mention Buddhism); but with reference to Lucretius, some genealogical clarification is in order.

Montaigne is a major presence, a steady force, in Blaser's work. Emerson, in *Representative Men,* finds in Montaigne the solution to his need for a philosophy of "fluxions and mobility." "Every fact is related on one side to sensation, and on the other to morals," the essay begins, as Emerson outlines a Janus philosophy of the pitch-penny. "We never tire of this game, because there is still a slight shudder of astonishment at the exhibition of the other face, at the contrast of the two faces." The faces (as if in homage to Emerson's friend Carlyle) take a sartorial cast, sporting the variable wardrobes of Identity and Difference, Finite and Infinite, Relative and Absolute, Apparent and Real. The skeptic stands in the middle, aspiring "to be the beam of the balance" amidst these flipping coins. Montaigne was one of those Renaissance authors who were much taken by the reappearance of Epicurus and Lucretius after the vast blackout of Church opprobrium, and his *Essais* is plentifully stocked with Epicurean quotations. Of course, skeptics and epicureans are not the same, but Emerson's formulation suggests a convergence: both are adepts in the science of the balance. The tranquil life was the gist of Epicurus' Garden school training (to be attained by a non-attachment strikingly similar to that in Buddhism). The Epicurean principle of self-guided moderation aroused the ire of those who would live by rules, and so the adjective "epicurean" came to be synonymous with *libertine.* But the double meaning of "libertine" puts a check to the abuse, because in addition to meaning "sensualist" it also bears a political connotation somewhere between *libertarian* and *iconoclast.* It all comes together in Blaser's "Even On Sunday" after he cites Hans Mayer's recognition that, for outsiders, *"one's existence itself becomes a breaking of boundaries":* "we can thereby return to ourselves a *measure of freedom,* and take form— / the work of a lifetime—in this breaking of boundaries" (HF 349).

To achieve form by breaking boundaries is to deviate from the predestined course, to become oneself the rupture of that inertia, "the work of a lifetime." It is to swerve, and in swerving *become.* The *clinamen* or *parenklisis* is the most famous of Epicurus' concepts—most famously as transmitted by Lucretius. The *clinamen* is the sudden swerve of a falling atom, and each such swerve creates a pocket of turbulence, which is how material forms are generated. Now, these *pockets* are the very folds and pleats

of the *manifold*, the creases through which nature *increases*—paradigms, in other words, of poiesis or production. As I have been elaborating in this essay, Blaser's work advances by means of an articulation of *space*, an inclination of acknowledgment (citation as tactility, as in the old locution for *concerning:* "touching upon"), and a complication of address. It's in the *plt* of complication, explication, application, that we feel the *pleat* or fold of the atomic pocket, the bump of the swerve or *clinamen* where it issues in a clump or clot. A clinimized coagulate. An "unfolded fold" in the language of the poem that follows "Even On Sunday" in *The Holy Forest*, and further elaborated in the grand conclusions of "Exody," as Blaser brings Lucretius explicitly into the fold of his concerns (HF 370).

"Exody"—the culminating section of *The Holy Forest*, not just the poem of that title—makes absolutely clear Blaser's place in a network of Epicurean alliances that constitutes a tradition for which we have no name, so little has it been attended to. The Renaissance revival of Epicurean texts was not pervasive, and was often controversial: Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, Montaigne, Bruno, and much later Pierre Gassendi, Walter Charleton, William Temple, Thomas Jefferson—these are some acknowledged transmitters. The more recent diffusion of Epicurean principles is almost completely overlooked. But it would include Emerson, Thoreau, and Nietzsche; Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde; John Cowper Powys, Sacheverell Sitwell. . .Roland Barthes. . . The list sputters; the criteria are themselves indecisive. The most conspicuous expositors of Epicureanism at the moment (but also the most unheralded *as* such): Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze (by himself, and with Félix Guattari), Jacques Derrida (see "My Chances/*Mes Chances:* A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies" in Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan, eds., *Taking Chances* [1984]), and Giorgio Agamben.

7 Edgar Wind is pertinent again: "But however irregular and unfamiliar to the outward view, the hybrid gods of Orphic theology consistently follow a logic of their own, which is the logic of concealment. And by that logic their meaning can be 'unfolded' or made more explicit, provided the rule of 'infolding' has been mastered first, which Cusanus distinguished from *explicatio* by the quaint but fitting name of *complicatio*. When the Venus-Virgo becomes 'unfolded' in the three Graces. . .each Grace represents a less 'complicated' state of mind than the 'infolded' Venus from whom they descend. Theoretically, the process of explication could be continued indefinitely; and the farther it proceeds, the plainer are the elements obtained. But so long as the elements remain interdependent, they all partake of each other's nature, and pure externality is never reached. Absolute plainness is therefore an illusion produced by a severance of that universal link through which even the most 'explicit' members of this expanding series retain an inherent 'complication'" *(Pagan Mysteries*, 204-205). And, as a reminder: the medium of this "severance" is *Janus bifrons*, cutter and joiner. Wind elaborates the Neoplatonic aspect further: "When Pico wrote that 'the unity of Venus is unfolded in the trinity of the Graces', he added that he who understands that operation clearly and fully holds the key to the whole of Orphic theology. Indeed, the unfolding of a divine unit into a triad is but an inverse expression of the Neoplatonic law that 'the contraries coincide in the One'" (192). The Orphic mysteries have been misconstrued as harboring some grand ineffable secret; but as Wind's exposition makes clear, it is the earthly condition of mutability as "secret gate" (218) that proliferates concealment/disclosure in a continuum of folds. Just as there is always something plain, there always remains something yet to be explained. Having come into appearance or into the light of understanding, however, experience is folded back in the convolutions of memory, reverting to the *arcanum* or shadow world. In the end there is no secrecy, only temporality. Or time is that which secrets reveal—the revelation of which leaves an open secret, or secret *as openness*, "das Offene" of Rilke's 8th Duino Elegy. The open, the gap, the blank.

8 That cow tracks are the recondite source of writing is made explicit in Geofroy Tory's *Champ Fleury* (1528), a treatise on orthography. Tory proposes that all the letters of the Roman alphabet are derived from I and O, and that the exclamation "Io" "came into use as a proverb signifying exaltation and triumph. . .show[ing] the joy which the ancient Ionians felt in having invented & designed these said Attic letters" (23). As further evidence Tory recounts, by way of Ovid *(Metamorphoses* Book I) and Boccaccio *(De Genealogia Deorum),* the tale of Io, the girl turned into a cow by Jupiter's lust, whose identity is revealed to her father by the hoofprints she leaves in the mud, spelling her name.

9 Blaser: "The archaic may be understood as a pre-rational language of being in love with the earth and the heavens. . ." (Violets 90) Pre-rational: before the ratio, the stipulated address. To be in love with the world without positing a limit, or limits, of either love or world. Love precedes measure, but in this precedence love excites or stimulates measure. The primal measure of sexual conduct is cosmology. Sex is cosmological symptom.

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PETER QUARTERMAIN

THE MIND AS FRYING PAN: ROBIN BLASER'S HUMOR

"The vices of the mind are not to be underestimated."
—Robin Blaser. Letter to Anne Waldman 1992.[1]

"He said he was surprised and he said laughing is coughing."
—Gertrude Stein. "Pink Melon Joy"[2]

"A being radically devoid of any representable identity would be absolutely irrelevant to the State."
—Giorgio Agamben *The Coming Community.*[3]

This paper is a pastiche. What I have to say draws in part upon very interesting observations and reflections on laughter by Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Birth to Presence;* by Catherine Clément, in *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture;* and most of all by David Appelbaum, in his really quite extraordinary book *Voice.*[4] That acknowledgment alone should be sufficient notice that an alternative title, and certainly an unspoken refrain throughout this paper, is Robin Blaser's own recurrent "The truth is laughter."

My title comes from Blaser's poem

hard, gemlike flame

I've always liked the idea of the mind as a
frying pan

What's in it is neither true nor false.[5]

It's a pretty weird poem, I guess. The title comes from Walter Pater's famous sentence at the conclusion to *The Renaissance:* "To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."[6] Is this the flame that heats the (I guess cast-iron) frying pan, temporary holding ground for mixes of one sort or another, some things there perhaps by design, the bulk of them there by chance, stirred up together, some a little bit scorched, some perhaps half-cooked, the rubbing sliding rolling heating hurlyburly of the frying pan intensely physical, an ecstasy possibly without transcendence? Whatever it is, it's neither good nor bad: what's in it is simply *there,* itself, becoming perhaps something else, shifting about, tumbling among flavors and aromas, seasoning the pan itself, leaving something behind, emerging with bits of whatever it has acquired from the pan itself in its earlier uses, yet still its self. A fried egg, after all, is still an egg, I guess. But as I hope we shall see, it's a little more complicated than this, and not easily susceptible of explication. Maybe it ceases to be an egg at all; let's just say for now that whatever it is, it is still its *whatever—**that*** is what I shall come back to. And the poem makes me laugh, its incongruities making for continuing surprise.

The main drift of my argument is very simple indeed and really quite obvious. It goes like this: that Blaser is a very funny man, blessed (cursed) with great wit, a great sense of mischief, and a great outrage. That it is precisely through humor, through laughter (closely related as it is to the cough), that two realms can meet in this, the only world we've got. And the realms? the realm of the body, where as Allen Ginsberg reminds us we are simply meat talking to meat; and the realm of the spirit, also known as the world of the imagination, as deeply rooted into our historicized meat as is our body itself. Laughter—like other syncopes and interruptions of the breath, such as the stutter—dissolves the dualisms of body and spirit, body and imagination, body and mind. An interjection of the body, laughter (like the cough) "shocks the cognitive apparatus in its brute reminder of organic experience" (Appelbaum 8), "deprives the body of its obedience to the mind" (Clément 7). Laughter affirms our subjection to flesh and thus to time, momentarily negating the mind's life so that—as Blaser's poem puts it—"what's in it is neither true nor false." Laughter is essential to, indeed, quintessential of, Blaser's "fundamental struggle for the nature of the real."

A couple of weeks ago I asked Blaser which of the old Aristotelian or medieval humors was his. Without any hesitation at all, he replied: "melancholic."[7] When you consider the alternatives available—the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the choleric—the speed of Blaser's reply is perhaps not too surprising. But listen to this:

> The physiological syndrome of. . .abundance of melancholy includes darkening of the skin, blood, and urine, hardening

> of the pulse, burning in the gut, flatulence, acid burping, whistling in the left ear, constipation or excess of feces, and gloomy dreams; among the diseases it can induce are hysteria, dementia, epilepsy, leprosy, hemorrhoids, scabies, and suicidal mania.[8]

In the middle of the fifteenth century Leon Battista Alberti offered a kind of solace for those afflicted with this condition, in an explanation as pertinent to the poet as to the painters he's talking about:

> Painters become melancholics because, wishing to imitate, they must retain the phantasms fixed in the intellect, so that afterward they can express them in the way they first saw them when present; and, being their work, this occurs not only once but continually. They keep their minds so much abstracted and separated from nature that consequently melancholy derives from it. Aristotle says, however, that this signifies genius and prudence, because almost all the ingenious and prudent have been melancholic. (Quoted by Agamben, *Stanzas* 25)

Melancholia: grief for the loss of what you never had and which never even existed in the first place. The mind, hungering for the ordered harmonies of angelic space, hungering for the smoothly undisturbed stability of pristine, soulful, eternal bliss, for the securities of control, the self-calmed melancholic mind in its affliction of desire. Melancholia, obsessed with Becoming, forgetful of Being,

> as if the earth under our feet
> were
> an excrement of some sky
>
> and we degraded prisoners
> destined
> to hunger until we eat filth
>
> while the imagination strains
> after deer
> going by fields of goldenrod in
>
> the stifling heat of September
> Somehow
> it seems to destroy us[.][9]

Melancholia, erasing the body, rejecting the now. Melancholia, which Giorgio Agamben diagnoses as a condition of possession and loss at the same time. Its gravidity is absurdly vulnerable to the sabotage of the body's stutters, laughs, and pratfalls. No wonder, then, that "the truth is laughter," and that those four words are so persistent a refrain through Blaser's poetry. No wonder then, that another melancholic, William Carlos Williams, could reflect, late in his life, that "The mind is the cause of our distresses."[10] Laughter, like the cough, the stutter and the sneeze, restores us to our Being.

Yet—as the long description I just read reminds us—Melancholia is not exactly a silent condition. Indeed it's emphatically physical: flatulence; burping; whistling in the left ear. That burning in the gut no doubt gives rise to sorts of subterranean stomachic gurgles, groans, rales, hiccups, moans, wheezes, clicks, squirps and rasps, now and again emerging as voiced burps, and belches and farts, coughs stutters stammers sneezes sputters hesitations and even laughs, little physical and vocal anguishes and reliefs which polite society tries not to notice, and which poems rarely if ever record and which have been utterly banished from reasonable discourse. The sounds of the body digesting, breathing, moving, sniffing, starving, tasting, drinking, spurting, chewing, shitting. The sheer restlessness of the body while we think. The sheer surprise of the body, announcing its presence to its own ear, but unrecognized, denied and even erased by the mind.

Historically, the sounds of the body have been eliminated (if that's the word I want!) from speech, from discourse, from the poem, from signification. If as Aristotle thought, "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience," then what sort of mental experience is a sneeze? If, as John Locke suggested, words "stand for nothing but *the ideas in the mind of him that uses them,*"[11] then what idea in the mind does a cough stand for? What sort of word is a cough and what is its meaning? At some concerts or at the opera a cough means you're bored, but what kind of cough is it anyway? What does it sound like? "Ungrammared sound stops thought," says Appelbaum (18). What is a stutter but the body, coming to thought, body's insistence calling to mind, flesh claiming possession of thought, disrupting it in its coming, resistances conjoined in the struggle of breath's interruption and thought's urgency. (The truth is laughter.)

We are so used, in our culture and in our experience, to Cartesian dualities of body and mind, flesh and spirit, that we rarely question them. Our language—and our notions of language—reinforce the distinction we draw between (to adopt an older vocabulary) the soul and its house the flesh. But "The plan is the body," says a Creeley poem, picking at that separation of mind and body so pandemic in western thought, worrying away at its erasure:

"Plan is the body. The mind
is the plan."[12]

Readers familiar with the magazines *Wired* and *Mondo 2000*, with their assiduous worship of an irresistible technology, know a different story, reversing it, erasing the authority of the flesh. Technology accelerates the moves of body into mind, or the divorce of mind from body. As Scott Bukatman observes, "The hands appear *here*, while the wording appears *there*. Typing produces an information space divorced from the body: a proto-cyberspace."[13] One feature of the "WANDAH" program developed at the University of California Los Angeles between 1978 and 1984 and marketed in 1986 as the *HBJ Writer for the Computer* was "Invisible Writing" where the writing appears *nowhere*. The program doesn't let you see what you type because "not seeing what you type will force you to concentrate exclusively on your thoughts." Writing and thinking thus lose almost all apparent corporeal being.[14] The body is the mind, says the cyberfreak, lusting for cybersex, panting after his (the genderization here is deliberate) multimedia teledildonics (a term apparently coined by Howard Rheingold in his 1991 book *Virtual Reality)*. In the discourse of cyberspace thought and sex are virtually indistinguishable,[15] and among "the artificial intelligentsia" (the label is Louis Fein's)[16] the move toward ultimate but nevertheless earthly disembodiment gathers momentum. Marvin Minsky, in *The Society of Mind* (1986), suggests replicating the individual by replacing each brain cell with a computer chip, and asks "Would that machine be the same as you? It would be impractical," he concedes, "to duplicate with absolute fidelity all the interactions in a brain" (289), but these microscopic differences would not make the duplicate different from your mind because you yourself are constantly changing and are never exactly the same as you were a moment ago.

The truth is laughter. In 1989 Hans Moravec, director of the Mobile Robot Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon University, hoped that "it will some day be possible for mental functions to be surgically extracted from the human brain and transferred to computer software. . . .The useless human body would then be discarded." As Claudia Springer put it (163), this means that human consciousness would be stored in computers except for the occasional outing in mobile robots.[17] Moravec calls this process "transmigration," and I wonder: has he ever laughed? Anyone who followed George Bush's conquest of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War on a television screen has a very clear sense, surely, of the extent to which public and political discourse assumes the expendability and irrelevance of the human body in its quest for a paradise of the mind. Has nobody read Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads?*

It is astonishing how few phonemic representations we have of the laugh, how impoverished the vocabulary of mirth. What a surprise, for instance, to read this, in the *I Ching*—and how do we read it?:

> "Laughing words—ha, ha! The shock
> terrifies for a hundred miles."[18]

What sort of laugh is that *ha, ha!?* divine? mad? innocent? devious? malevolent? Is it the laugh that terrifies, or the "laughing words"? Is the one who laughs terrified too, or just those who hear it? We have so few words to record or register the laugh, in writing, that mostly we don't bother—once you've said "ha ha" or "teehee" you've pretty well exhausted the lexicon. Those we do have for laughter tend to be descriptive rather than mimetic—or their mimesis is vague. They don't, that is to say, tell us exactly what the sound of it is."[19]

"The vices of the mind are not to be underestimated," wrote Blaser to Anne Waldman, but he is too smart to disturb his poem with a transcribed laugh; the sort of disturbance offered by transcription is too equivocal, too ambiguous, too bent on forcing the reading—and it is not, let's face it, a laugh. His poetry does not have the imprecise but predictable fixity of a "ha ha!" or a "teehee!" but instead undertakes the unpredictable risk of the reader's laughter, which arises (conjured at a place and in a mode beyond both his and our control) as we read. In this he is transgressive, for voiced but ungrammared interruptions enter and disturb the syntax of the poem, disrupting the smooth continuity of cognitive thought, breaking the focussed concentration the text demands, removing us from the act of *reading* so that we have to find our way back to it again. Blaser brings into the poem, that is to say, what historically we have expunged from discourse, from articulated speech, and from "the life of the mind"—the sounds of the body. That is to say, the sounds of our own mortality, our own subjection to the flesh.

"He said he was surprised and he said laughing is coughing." Gertrude Stein was right to link the two: Laughter always bursts, it always comes as a surprise, you really cannot plan to laugh any more than you can plan to cough—though of course you can fake it, the way lecturers cultivate a sputtery cough to buy time or to pretend to think, the way Winston Churchill practiced his oratorical stutter in order to engage his hearers. But the laughter I have in mind comes in fits, and is no more under control than is an epileptic seizure: in the midst of a laugh we do nothing but serve a spasmodic expulsion of sound. Our voice, indeed our whole being, is subservient to and even identical with that upwelling turbulent whirlwind beginning where? in the belly or the bowels, from the cavities of the thorax through the lungs and larynx out of the throat and mouth, the body in its

convulsions forcing us into our *organic* intelligence. In Tibet, says a Persian tale, there is the laughing stone. "Those who set eyes upon it fall into violent laughter which continues till they die."[20] What do we really remember in the middle of a laugh? In such brute manifestations of organic experience, Edmund Husserl complained,

> one man communicates nothing to another: their utterance involves no intent to put certain 'thoughts' on record expressively, whether for the man himself, in his solitary state, or for others. Such 'expressions,' in short, have properly speaking, no meaning.[21]

But of course they all have meaning. Making focus vanish, the laugh takes us back into the now, into the world of the involuntary, of chance, of disruption, the world of what Giorgio Agamben calls the *whatever*, where there is no *thus*, nothing outside the immediacy of the event which holds us in its grip. The divisions of meaning-unmeaning, voluntary-involuntary, mundane-sacred, good-bad, momentarily dissolve, for the cognitive world which created these divisions has been completely destabilized; at such a point we don't even know especially that we are, or that we are "in" a body. Such matters are irrelevant. "Whatever singularity," remarks Georgio Agamben, "rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State" (88).

And of course (is this a paradox?) the *impulse to laugh* (I do not mean the laugh itself) is triggered by the mind—it is a mental event. "The mind is the cause of our distresses," Williams wrote, "but of it we can build anew." And the building?

nomad

the grounds shift all
the time
as paradises must[22]

What a shock of recognition and discovery to recall—as does the poet in this astonishingly physical poem—that "must" is— as one dictionary so restrainedly puts it—

> a condition of strong nervous excitement or frenzy to which elephants are subject, the paroxysms being marked by a dangerous irascibility[23]

—that is to say, sexual frenzy. The laughter and the satisfaction of discovering *that*, and that "must" is also mold or mustiness and is also newly pressed grape juice not yet fermented wine, is precisely the work of the mind moving into corporeality.

The kind of building I have in mind is precisely that effected in the midst of laughter, that curious stoppage of the breath in which we dwell in *the already*, wherein the flesh does not stand *between* us and the world because it *is* the world, in which the seer and the seen are in some odd sense one—a world without divisions and dichotomies, complete in its immediacy, then—and at the same time, completely and utterly itself, a singularity. To be such is to enter Agamben's *irreparable:*

> images exit from Plato's
> kismet and other irreparable
> absolutes
>
> (***Nomad***, lines 4-6)

Laughter is its own determination; it does not point outside itself to an identity; it is not subject to an identity. The laugh is a singularity, a singularity without identity—I do not laugh as a Canadian, or as a man in his early sixties, or as an entity named Peter Quartermain. I laugh as a laugher. How does Appelbaum put it?

> "The laugh. . .makes the name that I call myself. . .the butt of laughter. That a person is known in essence as such and such a name, is born, dies, is acclaimed, upbraided, cajoled and vilified by a particular phonemic assemblage—and believes himself to *be* that name—is a joke of such magnitude that only a full-blooded laugh can explode it. (19; italics added)

A farewell to inhibiting reason, laughter is its stoppage—and it is also, as Thomas Hobbes famously phrased it in *Human Nature* and again in *Leviathan*, "a sudden glory."

But we can no more spend our lives caught in the middle of a perpetual never ending laugh than we can spend it in the middle of a perpetual cough, or in the suspension (Clément's syncope) between stutters, between breaths, that curious cessation of becoming—where, in this world, we can unequivocally BE. That we cannot *live* there is inescapable cause for melancholy; that we can be there at all is equally inescapable cause for mirth, and for joy. The body claims our awareness for its own, subject to no dogma, no identity, no claim of the State. The truth *is* laughter.

31 May 1995

NOTES

This is the text of a paper given 4 June 1995 at the conference "The Recovery of the Public World: The Poetry and Poetics of Robin Blaser" held at Emily Carr College, Vancouver, 1-4 June 1995.

1 Quoted by Anne Waldman on 3 June 1995 in her paper, "Deviant Identities," at the Robin Blaser Conference.

2 Gertrude Stein. "Pink Melon Joy," *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla Dydo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993) 305.

3 Giorgio Agamben. *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 86.

4 Jean-Luc Nancy. "Laughter, Presence," *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993) 368-392; Catherine Clément. *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll and Deirdre M. Mahoney (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1994); David Appelbaum. *Voice* (Albany: SUNY P, 1990).

5 Robin Blaser. *The Holy Forest* (Toronto: Coach House, 1993) 296.

6 "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end," says Pater *(The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* [London: Macmillan, 1922] 236).

7 Conversation with Robin Blaser, 22 May 1995.

8 Quoted Giorgio Agamben. *Stanzas: Word and Phantom in Western Culture*, trans. R.L. Martinez (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 11.

9 William Carlos Williams. "Spring and All XVIII," *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970) 132-133.

10 William Carlos Williams "To Daphne and Virginia," *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*. Vol. 2: 1939-1962, ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions, 1991) 247.

11 Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* I 16a, trans. E.M. Edghill *(The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W.D. Ross, vol. 1 [London: Oxford UP, 1928]); John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book III, chapter 2 (London: Dent [Everyman's Library], 1947) 204 (his italics).

12 Robert Creeley. *The Collected Poems 1945-1975* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 601.

13 Scott Bukatman. "Gibson's Typewriter," *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery [Durham: Duke UP, 1994] 79.

14 *HBJ Writer User's Manual* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 42.

15 "The only thing better than making love like a machine, it seems, is making love with a machine," suggests Mark Dery, "Sex Machine, Machine Sex: Mechano-Eroticism and Robo-Copulation." *Mondo 2000* 5 (n.d.): 42-43.

16 Louis Fein, quoted in Joseph Weizenbaum. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976) 179.

17 Much of the material in this and the previous paragraph is drawn from Claudia Springer's excellent article "Sex, Memories, and Angry Women" (in Dery, *Flame Wars).*

18 *I Ching*, trans. Richard Wolheim (Princeton: Bollingen, 1950) 197.

19 The list is not much enlarged if we think of the adjectival forms, or of synonyms for laugh and laughter: bellow, cackle, chortle, chuckle, exhilaration, giggle, grin, guffaw, hilarity, jocundity, joviality, merriment, mirth, roar, simper, smile, smirk, snicker, snigger, titter, waggishness, etc. Most phrases describing the laugh are just that: descriptions ("burst his breeches," "rolling on the floor," and so forth)—the fact of the laugh is more important than its sound.

20 Basil Bunting. *Complete Poems* (Oxford UP 1994) 210.

21 Edmund Husserl. *Logical Investigations*, trans J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) 1:275.

22 Robin Blaser. *Nomad* (Vancouver: Conference on the Recovery of the Public World, 1995).

23 *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* (New York: Century, 1896) entry for Must[3].

ROBIN BLASER

NOMAD

the grounds shift all
the time
as paradises must

images exit from Plato's
kismet and other irreparable
absolutes deserted shoes
and barefoot, desirous walks
a long way
lion's teeth spring
from crevices in the sidewalks

when I reach the age wherein
words and books are upside-
down down as up is a more engaging
proposition than to say they are
one—C-sharp minor whistling at every crossing

which said, "Come into my wild yellow room,
into wild yellow poppies, into 'wild-logos'
upon woven sand and willowed shores, a wildered
core"

must-hands—now and again honey-hands—reach
for 'life's measureless body' *(Musil*

'I think, therefore I am' *(Descartes*
'I think, therefore I am. . .I think' *(Philosophy 100*
'I am, therefore I think' *(Zukofsky*
'I walk, therefore I am' *(Deleuze*

as paradises must

JACKSON MAC LOW

WHO BUILDS WHITE-CLOCKED BILLOWING WALLS?

{Forties 64}

Who builds words in hedgehogs flowers and ignorance
a hundred eyes and never a nose he blunts he shuts
the marrowbone beat his story to a tiger of a growth most tender
tentative fluid collections of largesse sustain in freedom juiced-
    out space that draws on other drives'
intentional ptomaine self-detraction

Incoherent linear sneers pattern difficult things
stammering tools calculate spherical aberrations
brute harmoniums quarrel with stir-altar flows
deceived monocles scramble ethical light illuminating
    echolalic hemispheres
essence exchanges for objects

Problem farms lack loser bottles everywhere
stranger than darling candles' únjust temperament
reversible changes paste collison cycles
self-propulsive geysers' architectonic gunk upsets pusillanimous
    sun-struck buns'
capillary líniment cradles

Asynchronous 'tween boiling terminal bands
encyclicals modulate heteroglossic bag-lady walks
assisted testicular desserts reawaken dead animals

provincials replaying Montaigne's unnerving idleness liberally
fear the most completed exile cruelty
while rhetoric evaporates relief

Cloudburst-mottled Africans on numbered squares
embodied workings blazing in possessions
so much of the noise is nothing but itself impossibly gripped
by shiny poplars underground in the lull conjoined to a
hazardous inverted myth of truth
infernally blunted innocence

Nonexistent Tasaday abandoned haunted presences
floating coded selves in London windowboxes
resilient balls of bread for squawking ducks
more fit for marginalia than fateful music leaving-métaphors-
behind on clicking tongues'
fading data strands

Drydock fingertips on place-mat boxer shorts
in multiples of coal in a state of exhaustion
with little gaps in the edifice pierced by the wilderness
the bony purchase of covering seaweed is focussed inward by
freesias flanked by centrifugal irises fainting in
angelológical excess

Beset by catatonic-seízures' slippery architecture
gesturing close to rivers' conscious oblivion
vértigo-transformations scramble the sky
awkwardly grounded in acrid velour as flowers stare at surfaces
surprised by latticework or
white-clocked billowing walls

Silences and/or prolongations:
3 en-spaces [ ] = duration of 1 unstressed syllable.

BRIAN D LUCAS

THE CIRCLE MARKED

The window first knew containing
dimension and ice cities too longer
too soon watching crave of absence of a
sound slowly rising from nothing but
a reaction. How dared the man, the
ball of rings, supposed catalyst and
fogged in neighbor, hand flat brow
looking out endlessly keep constant.

A halted process distant, nutfed.

So warms corner holy and rust photos
smearing past identities in face
mud wall getting towards that person.
Elevations where the keys knocked
gold small slivers around every object.
That corner, this arm, gray hat
on top platforms, inquisitive noons'
color ended.

So high you can't go around it. The
speech near south, of equation, of
that of secret directions:

    it start out object, object, object

Grown in backward nearer to be
corrected into the contemporary.
Face of the water slows to a single
molecule. Now elbow means itself there

there and final. Drawn under such
an illusion.
Showing grate where deposit intuitive
exchange on corner of spectacle. Pulse
marked thoroughly and changed upon descent.
Charactered effect therein:

justice in brickwork
impulsive shouting
eyeglass treatments

Again the tables dance, the bells
cinder and scratched makeshifts into &
toward thinness. Long lining the main
hotel shapes, disaster horse on arm
cradles wept. Missed that placement
in years or similar in magic. Dropped
that thing of fire and lived this lane
in ochre nests for how long masterfully.

Vanish, my heat. They didn't expect
to lie here. Vanish the protein, the
can next to the tom. Around visitor's
commandment one year passed into
the next. Trees shorn for gems. The
flat of heat stayed, the place
of rest disappeared. Strings of
electricity vertical writ and
understanding included the other with
an addition & then the continuance
with one word constantly used.

kept it up in the closet
from one glass
one spatial compass

But in this time or sequence of train
pulling itself there is mercy like the
strange Mind. Everything packed

the likeness of frames. The
constitution of unknowable is
grace and a star.

Working under bridges the lift and display
of how each rock is its own historical fact.
Distracted in light caught between a
salute and a fin. In the outtakes of
civilization this was prevalent: sutures
on holy stones meant to signify soul analysis.
The broken lead test. Whisper in a hole
to message drop, grain contained within
the envelope. Forgetting the change in
memory—the length to finally get.

He winced alone; Saturdays made weary
and striking. And in the dims terra-cotta
lit the area. Kill the seven gears and
utilities heresaid. One jaw lacquered
& named. When the mark became more
obvious they stopped the ship to let
him off. Forgotten.

Desperate ores in wish vibrant sources
no plans in carbon. Without swift
selves it intervened to cause a gentility
& there was reverence. To rise was
this happening in sleep from This. Mouth
placed, stir in pockets, struck in its
timelessness, over gate into the side
where the given flourishes. And where
tell it is moved as I.

The collapse corner shellstone in the wall
appearing throughout. Table rested to any
unseen, but the center is switching turmoil
to hallucination. Or is the strength in
model. Moment unsolved then where.

Down told to this one: stationary
heat elongated through atmosphere
dialing the unbelievable along the way.
Center sat and there was the attempt
steepled to the side of the belief.
Anchors for will. Steps that still
took out of sight amidst recollections
separating one voice in the whole
from the others. Then there was
the clearing ahead waiting, sold into
the periphery. Of watchtowers,
fingers, and grace landing shard.

Led into scratching the paperside only
music figured, afraid to circle for us.
Lent in a filled hive—reverberation
trumpet countless immaterial (not of
this level) timepockets. Settling into
the begetting of different sources: calm
applications of these to the letter
pourings. And always this self-knowing
is seen. Stranded lost waters, mind
of baby purple, near dust bolts, closet
inhalation, & open savers.

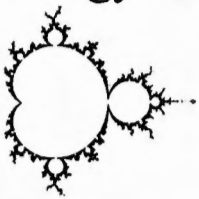
Wanted now fronting ramble and hand
crease, felling banks and tea. It
or the name is termed found pinned
to one of the trees. Stating the inner
grain turned over & over into a
radiance or sub-animal spectacle. Never
confusion maintained in glass flutes
or sizable connection.

Deletions in space. All around me things
were mistaken for objects. Also the
propulsion of bent metal into real
knocking under the floor. The wind meter
continuith, the organ still mastered the

section of enrapt. It was brought up
then zooming into hearing and then
closing itself in its ending.

Now's the part not to be understood
moment inseams of flagrance tied
underside. Twin bellows lightly over
the top and cymbals. Energy brushes
restored from the contained soot.
Such is restoration

In the Analogy by John Clarke



A ravishing translation of the sonnet into an American language, *In the Analogy* astonishes with the vast range of its thinking and reference. This is John Clarke's final work, not exactly finishing though it knows that fact, but finally just stopped dead in its tracks. It includes six and a half books, each complete book containing 40 sonnets.

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—Robin Blaser

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RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

from DRAFT 23: FINDINGS

11. Wet rails, and the oil of crushed leaves.

Forget sententia.

Just a button by the curb.

That extremity dilates vision, I can barely
walk where it is, registering
the vectors, its self, its sewer,

its user, its loser,
their possible pattern, to repeat
it (or in) again,

cast into chance, give them odds,
it's all or nothing
with modifications.

Typing loose; getting loose on the page,
to repeat it again.
Is grande randonnée—a walk down a trail—

linked to random? or is it all
sets of linked modules, each logical
only to themselves.

But with the "d" on my keyboard
sticking and "ifficult" to register
because of the sticky weather

I got on the page "linked moules"
which authorizes a double homage
to MM. Marcels Duchamp and Broodthaers.

Absolutely not the same idea as the
zoom in on the button.
In fact, it's totally opposite,

but both are present
never- and
nonetheless.

12. Non. Say it "known," that is "none" as nones and tides
a certain prayerful force.
Say it "non-" — as non-combatant, non-participant,
and fear again, as during the so-called Gulf War
of wearing even a scrap of non-compliance or resistance
because of the ferocious "support"
itself perhaps just support for a "fast action"
and bringing the combatants
home to engulfment in our usual lives.
Now suffering from the deformities of
their recent children,
chronic malaise, nervous system totally shot,
falling apart at the touch,
from inexplicable untraceable non-focused or inadmissible
agents inciting
chemical or biological
aceldama-rich damage.

Understand complicity and cowardice.
When little yellow rosettes and flags
are sported in a certain
atmosphere, can barely speak

known, and non- or "non!"
the french for NO
"we should have known"
or said NON!
faster?
Being powerfully sorry
being unspeakably sorry
now, let me count the ways.

13. Cricket cages, summer and autumn,
airy or warm, encouraging song.
Tiny cricket-plates for dinner,
porcelain, depicting aphids.
Cricket beds as snug as boxes
cricket poems inscribed inside them,
just the ticket for insect reading.
Cricket rings for bouts of boxing,
and long brush-like cricket teazles
to push them to the ring and make them fight.

21. About rhumbs, gradations on the compass rose.

A silent turning in all directions

drawing attention to its shape: circle, vector and box

silence, emptiness, dumb

diminishing, suddenness, fear,

void, gradations, swings,

wind shifts, wind chill, wind shear,

factors, statistical probability, cab brnt, mn ded

flt scttr

look out where.

Boxing, turn that magic wheel, round and round

and random, some spurt, some pulse, some phrase, but what

[and where:

Could be a particular kind of "R" like a "rho,"

rhapsody, rheum, rhythm, rhododendron, rhyme.

Why here, why this, why now, why me, or no?

That's what I have to say.

The word itself, with its rh- and -umb,

jostles the memory.

PETER COLE

FUNCTIONAL THROUGH A BELIEVING

Pigeons kissing,

twisting beak to beak unbroken
emerald rayon necks
in guttered eaves
under the water
tanks
and solar reflectors

or lesser
kestrels fucking, rampant,
wings flapping
there at the
roof's ledge

like sepulcher images
guarding a soul,
or bowsprit figures posed
for a ship's
keel and power
facing waves:

functional

through a believing
(loving
/hating)
mind alone—

aligning decktop
ropes and career

in proper knots
and coils,

or nets—

through crimes against

budget devotions
and meaning's debt/

on the ceiling's order
of the African Church
at its circle's center
a star diffused
with stars around it in azure
to draw the spirit eye

first

up, then ear

to hear

with balm entering,
and cassia and myrrh;

with cinnamon, costus, and cloves;

a globed and angeled zone
there
for

anamnesis of things
invisible now
and in origin

even while threading the eye—

as easily slipped through thought

as an earring into its lobe. . .

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LUISA FUTORANSKY

TWO POEMS

(Tr. from the Spanish
by Jason Weiss)

CREMA CATALANA

In Gerona I deciphered names
on old Hebrew memorial stones
I saw the millennial tapestry, impressed till I die
with its emblematic winds and persistent blues,
I offered myself to the intimacies, ravages and refusals
provoked by the fervent contacts between visitors and hosts
with whom we exchange fleeting nomenclatures
of dead people who inevitably refer to others,
more rotten, ferocious and private.
I silenced them as I could crossing through the trap of
deforming mirrors;
I intended to drown them eating and drinking, perhaps more
than I should, specialties of the house
and I ended up surrendering to the vision of the same film,
cartilaginous and formless that I always produce in
the tiring parallels of the highways.
In my hands I am left with this swollen face, scabby and
withered, where I am reflected
and with the aching staff of the word *desconegut,* unknown
throbbing in my lap.

SHE, THE FISHERWOMAN

There are evenings when I'd like to be a Portuguese woman
utterly in black from head to toe
with the sole occupation of waiting for the tides
that carry out and bring back my man, seaweed and fish.
But in the sharing out of labors
it was my turn to think I decipher the pendular swings
of my soul, of yours, and those of our ghostly relations
oh the dying spangles of the fish in the nets
and I, articulating the syllables of your face with my
    uncompassed rosetta stone
inch by inch, vicissitudes of days, nights, vigils
skins and sweats where I will always be a stranger
(for so long I was not in any of your dreams!)
and now the tide carries you to my current, my delta
you, awash with tree trunks, foam, spider fish
serpents, sea monsters, nets, astrolabes
phantoms—perhaps those at sea are the true ones—
pitiful sounds, tarantulated
translate, translate to me
because I'm rowing against the current and I'm getting tired
my shadow grows tired, asks for a truce
lifts a white flag
because although it sticks to your shadow they are two shadows
then, tell me a story:
"the vines are usually planted among rocks
because they gather the heat of the day
and at night they give it back to the vines"
and you took my hand to hold it over a tepid wall in Lisbon.

Maybe you had understood that it was my evening
to be a Portuguese fisherwoman and not wanting to have any
    other idea in my head
than the beat of the horizon line, the sand between our feet
and enough.

JEFFERSON HANSEN

THE MOON THE MOON THE MOON

The moon is a rock in the sky.
The moon is not only a rock;
The moon cries out in a blank night

Silent but for a heart popping. This heart
Is a pump made of sinew.
This heart seems a fruit's hard pit.

The heart cries out in a blank night,
Silent but for the pat of bare soles
Against wood, a sleepless

Child searching for toys or an intruder
Coming to hang some severed feet under
The porch light? Walking is a friction.

The sole is calloused skin on the bottom
Of the body. The soul is an invention
Of ignorance formed before neuroscientific

Knowledge. A soul hovers in this apartment
Blank as night is alive. A soul
Cries out blankly, silent but for a

Whisper against the red brick. Snow or an owl
Confused? This brain is liquid:
The moon controls the tide. The moon,

Alive as the brain of a cadaver.
A cadaver sings its symmetry
Silent but for the clicking of instruments

Telling the time to no body. When I write
"We" I don't know whom I include.
We cries out in a blank night

Silent but for a ragged dog sniffing
The can hoping for perhaps the return of
Last night's remains. We image

A silence, crying out in a cluttered night
That clatters and misses the startled
Green eyes. Silence, like the eye

Behind the camera finding its feet and
Wandering away, twitches behind sight.

PHILLIP FOSS

IDEATE: A GRAMMAR OF THE CATOPTRIC FLESH

PREFACE

[Damn the world Sophia ravenous speed pathetic collapse horizon voluptuous mythology after finish: bodies strewn stripped of talent of wind shield

lips shivering prescription for smoke
revolution

Or bless the world Sophia fragile conspiracy carnal vocabulary hypocrisy of light siege tawdry invention without intent

With what weapon to confront all landscapes uninfected with chromatics?

Bereft of nostalgia?

Flayed of tactile abuse?

Mere ball of unrendered]

GRAMMAR

We are entering or exiting through a tissue of measurement: duration of consumable refraction the way a night-blooming flower is anonymous always white there are signals which compel incisions brief emissions of pollen codifications of light assemblages in the sky bestial gods which plane off glass as personal replication this is sufficient ontology to have remade one in one's own image

sustenance to stumble blinded by night and scent subtle perfume cool breeze call it a tone emitted in oily drops from your pores

Turn left there is no track of exodus only a pane of glass painted by fire only a mask of micaeous clay tiny figurines portraying game animals plummeting from a cliff a dust devil erecting a woman's hair as if in fright O is the sound no music which accompanies the center of spin cornea the aureola surrounding your shadow body on a wall of fog as it plummets from the cliff a stretched resonating hide thump thump its heart in your mouth the song composed of ideas corresponding to liquids

You enter or exit tissue—membrane is architecture the houses are framed with bone drilled acoustically to translate sea storms—bearing a covenant with every thing you've forgotten remembering that to pass through each one's desires must be fulfilled disguises are unavoidable slight of hand encouraged extinct dialects perfected

as:

"Today the sky is empty; a soothing from the fatigues of visualization."

•

The seized. Black flagstone. These are a transcription. Of. At every stride more absence. Petite pink blossoms. Clouds rising off snow. The tumult of envisioning. Cactus as food. Elk skull on the road. Orange blossom scent. Above the octave closure. Chime of transport. Glottal. *The condition of merge.* Aft. North. Favor of repose. Various smokes. The conditioning of flight. Semiotics or palm writing. Lean of aspen. Species of unknown. Herbivorous teeth. Descending ash. Receding. Enveloping coins. Box. *As the artifice of appearance.*

So it all gets away: fragile storm, sympathy of the mezzo soprano, reflecting eye: descending chords that slow, hesitate, incorporate into the linear filaments of the wooden table.

A fire only in anticipation, imperfect polish; given the rudeness of some season, apathy to filigree, boredom: enough reason to close the world.

I will not concede this to the wrath of memory.

Interminable drone, like a fragment of attention disjoined from its object, occupies all longing: flower.

He watched the furnishings of the room permanently condescend to shadow; his fists into objects of shifting smoke. This was adequate to provoke laughter, a smattering of gunshots, cringing at the new moon.

It was a token of what would come after the singing: the lighthouse tilting, or the sea. An indifference. She plays the four bass notes unto nausea. A chronography of dispersal. The water shatters.

Is to plant something adequate retaliation?

Datura. Corpse. The letter X. Red dye seeds. Well. Unredeemed triangulation of dog, garlic, hypothesis of transmutation.

It falls toward you like a wall. You must shift your attention away from obsession toward accumulation.

Tide. Sparrow. Yellow slick of pollen. Silver button. Roof. Identifying fallen stones of the ruin. Law of happenstance. Vein of lapis.

It all gets away resembling something running on split hooves, universal apology.

(These are merely the facts reiterated in no particular sequence attributable to value.)

•

The emptiness posited as constituting the universe is inside the body. It merely escapes.

Prompted by a casual glance at a woman with no eyes or by removing the organs from an animal on the supposition that they are audible or by bleeding the fist and arm through a window pane on the supposition of air are common fallacies which motivate empathy with nothing, and constitute the process by which the world retains mass, a necessary requisite of gravitation, in the same way that the duration of one's life is determined by the duration of memory.

These processes are best symbolized by the sound made when one throws a small hand mirror into an alpine lake. A fleshy *tink*.

PETER REDGROVE

SERVICE

I.
A sky smocked with stars.
The bearded man bent
Over me like a terrible valet
And began sucking me off.
Outside the window the pagoda tree
Shook down not apples and plums
But coins and yonis of rain,
And I attended to those processes until
He began to take me and I was defenseless.
I looked down at him, my groin
Had a beard and a hair-parting.
He wiped his mouth and looked into my eyes
And kissed me and got up and began to lay out
My evening clothes.

II.
Her evening clothes, a blue inch,
A blue mile—different blues.
The hoop of her sex in her blue skirt,
The whoop. On St. Staines night
A breath of moon went through the house,
Dust in all its shapes rose and followed.
There was a case of butterflies
Made to resemble an open book
Hanging from the cornice showing all
The typefaces of the painted insects,
The logoi of the summer-lake.
Outside in the yard were puddles
Of dazzling filth. The fish grunted
And I pulled it out of the water.

III.
The grunt of fish
Pulled out of the water.
The schools of fish
In the linked fishponds
Slowly circling round and round
Like the works of great clocks
Set in the ground.
The simple pomp of a suckling woman;
The jet of her milk
Like the trail of a comet,
Her breast cool as lichen, hot
As that comet. She sits in the window,
The sky farsightedly
Touching the forest
With a shock of tallness, wavering heat
Retained by the trees
In the serious smell of the dry
Narrow avenues between the boles
And thunder drifting like a dark diamond.
The swan dipping and feeding
Was the nub of the whole lake's wheeling,
Now it is the woman feeding
Is the nub or boss.

IV.
The nub or boss
Of the Impossible is so seldom
Required of man, such as is asked
Of the green snake shifting its skin,
Unmasking. Fainting,
She seemed all made of hands—
Impossible. He enters the night—
Impossible again—as if it
Were a woman, her star-studded foyer.
Opening the door, there is some
Scurrying in the distance,
Tanks alight in the darkness
Set in the stone and paced out

By stalk-eyed, knock-kneed
Lobsters, and scooped by
Cobblestone cuttlefish—impossible
Creatures. The unbelievable dark green
Grim of school uniform
Like bottled children.

V.
Rain bottled in the dark
Unders of the rivers. Your
Lifelong nakedness: your
Bride. She dipped her head
Under the water and left
Her shed skin in his hands. He folded
Her clothes and his neatly on the bed
And then licked her quite roughly
But nicely all over until
She agreed to kiss him likewise. The beguile
Of mouth-water. They slept together
On a large velvet couch in an old stone room
And described to each other simultaneously
How the moon's tongue twined with theirs,
Putting their tongues out to salute the light
And thus they each tasted its luminous saliva.

VI.
Its saliva spun in the breath, kissing
The horse's warm brow gently,
The tide
Creamy-white as baby-clothes.
Wasps feed greedily on figs,
Over the cobbles the iron shoes
Of the horse generate visible
Current of green sparks. This bed
Won't bring me sleep,
And she was right; in the thick
And thin of the world I tossed
And turned; her belly-jewel
Winked in the cradling house,
In the rain's huge secret cupboard.

My getaway canoe won't work,
She stated, because of the drastic
Sweetness of his behind. Then
A vessel of hands carried
Me away carefully like
A vulnerable glass dice, and she
Entered her own fountain
Within that secret cupboard.

VII.
She is putting on
Her black silk evening gown,
The one woven with a golden dragon
Which she takes out
Of her secret cupboard. Her head
Emerges from the neck
Of the dragon. She pats its body
Around her. She applies
Makeup that emphasizes her qualities;
Now she has the body of a dragon
And the head of a woman, fused
At the neck. Samuel Ramey

Did it in Boito's *Mephistofele*
In red tights against a crimson backdrop:
It is a swimming singing torso
With rays of light, little horns,
Piercing his frontal bone like Mosaic horns,
Small shimmering crescent and decrescent moons;

Thus did Liberace also in his black
Sequined tailcoat against a sequined sky,
His body disappears among the stars, only his head
And hands left singing and playing
Alone in starry space; now

The black silk dragon gown has
White shadows splashed on it, galactic
Dragon-spit.

VIII.
My own fountain of dragonspit. For years
A baby child drifted over the roof
In molten astronomies, the constellation
Named "Daughter-to-Be." Then we entered
Each other's fountains, and made
A companion to our bed. That great light
Like doves and tin, the landaus
And diligences of cloud
Racing in the sky, colored
Like liberated ores out of the mountain,
The little person of cloud clinging
To the mountain's peak, the only visible part
Of the immense standing-wave of air,
The visible crest, flag and sign
Of its enormous rooms through which the
Air rises, air to breath, and back again
To warm breath, the cool mountain air
Charged with animal heat, and back again.

IX.
That ladder put back again
Against the shed wall as if
For keeps, her beautiful feet
And wondrous hands wander over
The rungs, and as a were-cloud
Reminds her of her former condition
As air, back and forward. The weather too
Goes walking over the sky, like flowers
Twining up ladders, she is both
Here and there, all bright sapphire
And contemplation. There is
A griffon of cloud hanging over the house,
And the bed in which she came to form
Is plumped like clouds—a sky-high
Event in which I remember
The sky was smocked with stars.

DEAN YOUNG

FIRST YOU MUST

Before the abstract cone enfiladed
in blue enthusiasm, you must learn
to draw a tree that looks like a tree.
But first you must draw a branch
so first you must study bark
at the Institute of Bark in Amsterdam.
You must learn the woody organelles in Dutch
although first you must be immunized.
Luckily this is not the 14th century
and you are trying to become a doctor of the throat
as you would have only the bodies of hanged thieves
to cut apart and hanging makes a mess
of the mechanisms of the throat. Hope
may be depicted as a cinder block wrapped
in aluminum foil which is pretty
rotten luggage. First you'll
fall in love with what you can't
understand. The baby ram butts the shiny tractor.
Nothing you draw looks like anything else.
First you must build a cathedral of toothpicks.
Write nothing but sonnets for a year.
The error is not to fall but to fall
from an ungreat height. First you must fall
for the girl like you on the boat
seeming to leave all she knows but also
unlike you in some very important, not only
glandular ways. The days grow short, icier,
the heart like a ram in a field surrounded by electric
wire. The single tree there in the wind
not looking much like a tree, full

of withered fruit vexed with caterpillars.
It resembles a tragic wig.
No verse is actually free.
Before oils, charcoal. First you must go
to Vermeer's birthplace. Bed linens crusty,
windows a-wink with all you do not know
like a horrible disease lurking in the genes.
I must know, you shout, shaking the girl hard.
This is a mistake. What she first thought
was your handsome intensity, she now thinks
is insanity. First you must be forgiven.
Before being a human being, you must be
a zygote. Ditto a horse, a ram, an alligator.
The tractor comes into the world from a pit of fire
like the trombone. Better than you have failed.
The girl hurries off in a form of native dress
you know not the word for. The test returns
with a big red X. Before watching the sun set
into the ocean of tears, you must study
optics. Sir Isaac Newton knew a lot about optics
before he new a lot about gravity and orbits.
What will make the girl return? And you call
yourself an artist. First you must suffer.
First the form in duplicate. Before the form,
the pre-form. Before crying forlorn forlorn,
rigor mortis. Before tackling the nude,
you must work for months with wooden blocks.

WOLFGANG GIEGERICH

ENDING EMANCIPATION FROM HISTORY: KAFKA'S "IN THE PENAL COLONY"*

Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" can be read as an allegory of history. The first and second halves of the story are dealt with separately in the two sections of this paper, following a brief summary of the contents.

1. The Meaning of History

> *An explorer visiting a penal colony is among other things to attend an execution performed with a unique piece of equipment which the officer in charge enthusiastically describes to him. The condemned person is strapped face down and naked onto the lower section of the apparatus, the Bed. Above him a section called the Designer controls the motions of the center part, the Harrow, according to a selected program. This program is the text of the particular commandment which the condemned person has disobeyed (in the present case of disobeying and insulting his superiors, it is "Honor thy superiors!"). This commandment is artistically engraved onto his body over the course of twelve hours, deeper and deeper, until the process leads to his death. The condemned man did not have a trial and does not know his sentence. "There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body," is the explanation. He does not even know that he has been condemned, and had no opportunity to defend himself. "Guilt is never to be doubted," says the officer. The text on the programming drawing which steers the Harrow cannot be deciphered by the eye. The condemned person deciphers it through his wounds.*
>
> *Previously, at the time of the since-deceased former Commandant who designed this ingenious apparatus, and indeed*

*This paper is the translated and adapted version of the second half of an Eranos lecture on "Die Alchemie der Geschichte" first published in *Eranos 54-1985*, Frankfurt (Insel) 1987, pp. 325–395. Translated by Susan Giegerich.

set up the entire penal colony, such executions were a public celebration. Already on the day before the execution, the entire valley was full of people, and when the machinery began to operate, the viewers stood on tiptoe. All knew, now justice was being done. At first, the condemned person still screamed, and was apt to eat some of the food provided for him. But corresponding to a carefully predetermined procedure, he quieted down around the sixth hour. Now the essential part began. Enlightenment came even to the most dull-witted. But this did not mean that anything extraordinary would have happened, the man simply started to decipher the inscription. Only a few spectators could have their wish fulfilled to watch the process from nearby. Sadly remembering the time gone by since the arrival of the new Commandant, the officer declared, "How we all absorbed the look of transfiguration on the face of the sufferer, how we bathed our cheeks in the radiance of that justice, achieved at last and fading so quickly!" But now, with the new Commandant, this penal tradition has fallen out of favor. The apparatus does not work well any more, and nobody comes to witness the executions.

Kafka himself described this story to his publisher as being "embarrassing."[1] This embarrassing character obviously comes from its sadomasochistic theme. Today, after Auschwitz, it has become even more embarrassing than Kafka ever could have imagined. Because the apparatus prefigures the Third Reich's machinery of systematic torture and destruction, it irritates the wound of a painful and immensely deep collective complex. We have to remain aware of this in order not to let Kafka's story and the fundamental questions it poses be sucked into the whirlpool of this complex. An understandable although unfortunate effect of this still hardly acknowledged complex is that public discussion over recent decades in Germany has politicized almost all important psychological, religious, metaphysical themes, reducing them to social issues, or subsuming them under such catchwords as fascism and socialism, thereby forsaking the only level on which many of the issues can meaningfully be addressed at all.

Kafka's penal colony is an allegory. Were we to take it literally as a political and legal structure of injustice in an actual society, it would conceal its meaning. If we regard it as an allegory, it does not deal with real people or citizens and what they do or is done to them. It deals with the *essence* of man and the meaning of human existence. What happens to the condemned man is literally and visibly what happens in an allegorical sense to human *essence:* "torture."

Kafka speaks into the situation of modern man, analyzed in detail in the first half of the original Eranos version of this paper. It is the situation of Emancipated Man resistant to the *depth* of events, the experience of which used to express itself in archaic times in images of divinities. The event (e.g., a flash of lightning) experienced as a manifestation of a God (e.g., Zeus) was *at once* "real" causal effect, "ideal" meaning and compelling obligation ("religio", here to be derived from *religare*, to bind). By splitting what was inextricably one in the primordial experience and by establishing a separate department for each of the aspects, namely the natural sciences for the flash of lightening as a physical event, the historical disciplines or the humanities for Zeus as a religious idea, and psychology for the impact (either of the flash or of the religious idea) on the human person, man's liberation from events and their depth was brought about. Physics allows viewing and manipulating causal effects totally apart from meaning; history allows indulging in "meaning" (ideas, images, etc.) apart from any natural effects; and psychology allows viewing what once was seen as the compelling obligation of events as merely subjective emotions *inside* the human person and thus severed from both objective reality and objective meaning (godhead). In this way modern man finds himself in a state of immunity, redemption, and freedom. In order to break through the hard shell of a humanity firmly enclosed in its godly subjectivity and protected against any compelling image emanating from the phenomena, in order to give this self-contained humanity, i.e., us, a sense for receptivity and vulnerability, very strong medicine is needed, and it is administered in the form of an extreme, cruel image. Kafka shows us a person strapped down and caught between the Bed and the Designer. No freedom. No hope. Inescapably subjected to a painful course of events. Kafka uncompromisingly forces this unbearable picture on us because "being imposed on," "wounded" and "hurt" is the theme of the story. It is not a question of literal sadism. Sadism here is merely how man's potential to be hit and wounded by the imaginal depth of reality appears to a redeemed consciousness. Kafka's story is as it were a response to the view of history as a blissful contemplation of the past.

One cannot read any of Kafka without being deeply moved at witnessing the artistic awareness with which he endures and gives profile to an immense tension. This is the tension between the orientation of a perceiving consciousness and the opposite orientation inherent in what this consciousness is perceiving. The artistry with which this tension is endured and the irony with which it is presented is the secret of Kafka's style. He writes against the grain. The point of view from which he tells a story always deliberately misses the point behind what is really being said. This is also true of "In the Penal Colony." Everything we learn is from the

perspective of the explorer, about whom it is cryptically said that he did not much care about or understand the apparatus. The understanding of the civilized, European explorer runs counter to the meaning of what he witnesses in a distant country, a situation not at all unknown in actual ethnological research.

The imposition Kafka forces on us is threefold: along with the condemned man we suffer the repulsive penetration of the harrow's needles; along with the explorer with whom we are united through the same civilized consciousness, we suffer being confronted with a repulsive method of execution; and as we ourselves, the readers of this story, we are offended by constantly having to be repelled by what is told, since Kafka forces us at first to take the misleading viewpoint of the explorer. With this last imposition Kafka prevents any premature, empathetic understanding of something foreign in the sense of a noncommittal historical past. The problem with historical understanding (just as in understanding the myths, symbols, and rituals of distant times and peoples) is that for the duration of such understanding, we leave *our* reality behind us, a reality identical to that of the explorer. Then, when we return to our own reality, we likewise again leave behind what we have just understood, so that the "right hand" does not know what the "left hand" has understood. Kafka holds us prisoner, just like he confines the condemned man. He forces us to *encounter* the foreign reality *through the medium of* our opposing view, and to painfully chafe ourselves on it, in the midst of our own actual present. He forces us to endure the "op-position," thus keeping both sides together.

When in our story there is talk of a penal colony, of guilt, or the courts, we are not meant to take these moral and legal designations literally. They are a result of the modern consciousness guided by the ideals of humaneness and of a constitutional state, which can make sense of this shocking and perplexing occurrence only in such categories. But what actually happens is something quite different, not punishment, but rather a ritual ceremony, a rite of initiation. The story itself gives us a hint in this direction when the apparatus is compared with equipment in hospitals (*"Heil*anstalten") and when such phrases as "the uninitiated" are used. In a similar way, commentators of late antiquity were already interpreting the rites of initiation recorded in Greek mythology in a moralistic, legalistic sense, as retribution for crime; one only has to think of the punishment of Sisyphus or Ixion in the underworld, or the dismemberment of Orpheus.

That this strange world is called a *penal* colony means that it is a culture that derives its raison d'être from punishment, i.e., initiation, and whose entire life is organized around this social institution. One does not have to be especially informed about one's "sentence," since existence as a whole means being "sentenced." "Guilt is never to be doubted": the need to be

initiated is certain. "Guilt" *(Schuld)* is also, in an amoral sense, a reference to the Norns (one of whom is called Skuld), and thus a reference to our fateful entanglement in the course of events; in that particular world being human means owing a debt *(Schuld)* to the real events, namely, having the obligation to cause their meaning to radiate forth.

The Designer has the purpose of engraving the "script" in the body of the condemned person by means of the Harrow. What kind of inscription? It is the judgment of a deed, a judgment which does not state anything new beyond the deed or condemn it, but which has as its content merely the commandment associated with the particular deed. It is only a reflection of what has already happened, bringing its essence to light. As the *artifex*, the Commandant had drawn up for every qualitatively unique situation in life an appropriate script. In this collection of drawings the officer is thus preserving nothing less than the essence, so to speak the archetypal patterns, of all possible life situations, here of course, in accordance with the dominant fantasy of a penal system, expressed in moral terms.

When we read the word "script" we usually imagine a communication which can be read. But the script meant here cannot be read. It is not written on paper, capable of being spelled out, letter by letter. That the text takes twelve hours to decode does not mean that it is long. Indeed, it consists of but three words and is complete from the first moment; in the course of twelve hours it is only engraved deeper and deeper. It is not a question of the "meaning" of a written script, but rather of its "sense," if we understand sense as orientation and not as comprehensible content. The transfiguration on the face of the condemned person does not come from his having grasped a new idea, some "higher" transcendental meaning. The texts are all well known and quite trivial, like "Honor thy superiors!" and the entire procedure has something routine about it. Just as the officer correctly and matter-of-factly puts it: nothing else happens. The transfiguration comes only from the intensity and depth to which the same script has penetrated in the course of being ever deeper inscribed. The meaning of this script comes only from its being an *in*scription, its having been written *in*, and not from its literal contents. Sense means here a vector originating from a particular event, passing through our flesh and into our essence. The meaning of events is the essential and inevitable deepening of the imposition by means of which they offend and take possession of us.

Thus Kafka imposes on us the experience of the destruction of our familiar idea of meaning conceived in the spirit of occidental metaphysics. We normally say that an event has a meaning if it is good for anything, if it is part of a larger plan, if it leads to a higher goal beyond itself, or provides a higher sanctification, just as life has a meaning for us if we can expect a hereafter. The meaning of the apparatus has nothing to do with any of this. Here, there is no hope, nor a regulated or chaotic succession of events, but

rather a totally monotonous being wounded deeper and deeper by one and the same event which has already occurred. The meaning achieved through initiation is, so to speak, at right angles to meaning in the narrative sense, which is founded on the hope of some kind of happy end. And the *essential* course of events is at right angles to successive time. Instead of flowing from event to event, from cause to effect, it remains within a particular, qualitatively determined moment as the inner intensity of that moment, even if this moment should last twelve hours, or even days, weeks, or years.

History as an image to be contemplated, as evolutionary progression, or as straightforward chronicle has been abandoned. History is the working on us of real events, the inscription of the "text" of a given situation into our being: reality as the alchemical laboratory, and the person as the workpiece, clamped into a frame and to be processed by events as the *artifex*. I myself am not the *artifex*, peering into a chemical retort in front of me. I am what is in the retort, being stewed and subject to the alchemical *mortificatio* and *putrefactio*. History as meant here is not directed towards an eschatological goal; it is directed at *our* heart. It is in and of itself psychological. It has the form of an initiation experienced on one's own body, the form of the transformation and not of an "objective" process "outside" which affects us only because of its consequences. Unemancipated man having no escape is from the beginning inextricably involved in the *essence* of history, just as history is involved in his *existence*.

In this story, history has again become "natural history," the primary unity of natural events and initiatory meaning, the "short circuit" of physical effect and spiritual image or impact. The same Harrow cuts physically into the body and causes the meaning of the inscription to radiate forth. The apparatus signals the end of the understanding of history as a "higher," "intellectual" dimension *over against* a "lower" dimension of "cosmic" or "natural" events, an understanding inaugurated in the "Holy *Script*ures."

The penal apparatus keeps nature and spirit together, and so its script can both wound and transform; it has deprived us of our dissociation, our escape. In the Scriptures, Israel's God withdraws from the company of the nature gods of the Middle East and becomes the Lord of history, which is thereby separated off from the cosmos. Just as Kafka undeniably alludes to the "Scriptures" in his metaphor of the "script," and takes away from this "script" the meaning of a "higher" truth, giving it instead the meaning of a natural process of being inscribed, he destroys both the *meta*physical understanding of history as well as the *meta*physical understanding of "script."

In this "natural history" there is neither past nor future *(Zukunft)*, because one and the same event here and now is "future" and "past" *(Gewesenheit)* in one: It comes ever closer to me with its essence *(Wesen)*

by cutting its meaning into me. The apparatus imprisons me for better or for worse in the present moment, forcing me to experience and taste it to the full, to the bitter end, neither flirting with the idea of any good old days in a bygone past, nor of an anticipated, better future.

The condemned person neither "understands" nor "feels" the meaning, both being subjective activities. He does not "have" any enlightenment, any "revelation." We are expressly told that "nothing else happens." The process remains in the realm of the matter of course. What happens is merely that the condemned person himself objectively *becomes* enlightenment and then *exists as* radiance. By cutting into the person and opening up his being the event slowly discloses its own meaning, thereby causing itself to radiate forth from him. All the activity is in the event itself. The person is like the wire in a lightbulb that begins to glow when the electricity of an event touches him deeply enough. He is both the location and the material which is needed to bring the meaning, or the imaginal depth, or the "face" of a moment to shine forth ("Enlightenment came even to the most dull witted"). This allows for a completely different understanding of what "becoming conscious" and "making conscious" could mean than is possible within the usual psychological framework.

The difference between written text and spoken word, between literary and oral traditions, so often debated since Plato, appears from the viewpoint of the colony's machine to be an illusory conflict. The real difference would be that between *our* writing or reading and our *being* inscribed, or the difference between our reading information and an *informatio* (impression) reading itself in and through the process of being inscribed. Or it is the contrast between our observations, meditations, introspections, and search for meaning on the one hand, and, on the other hand, our receptivity, our openness toward a guest who comes to us on his own initiative and brings his own world with him, seeking admission to our being. It is all the same whether the message is oral or written, as long as *we* want to be the ones who are doing the speaking, writing, or reading. Kafka's script is written and read by the actual event, and man is the parchment. Being a human means here that one's essence consists in being inscribable and vulnerable; it means letting oneself be marked by life, not passing through life as a clean slate. The essence of being human is *pathein*, suffering.

When Husserl describes phenomenology as the intentional consciousness' "contemplation of the essences" of things, and systematically abstracts from the experience of "existence," of actuality, etc., in the sense of *epoche*, it means that he is conceiving the notion of "phenomenon" in terms of our intent, our seeing and describing. However, this results in a very limited, truncated concept of phenomenality, and it is particularly inadequate for describing psychotherapeutic experience. In psycho-

therapy the issue is not pure essences, but phenomena in which actual, sometimes painfully experienced reality and its impact ("numinosity," instinctual dynamics) are inextricably combined with its essence ("luminosity," image, meaning). This combination is what Jung's term "archetype" or "archetypal image" refers to. Kafka's allegory clears the pathway to another, more complete idea of phenomenology, according to which intentionality is not a quality of consciousness, but of the phenomenon itself. This coincides, by the way, with Heidegger's thinking after his "Kehre." It is not consciousness which "intends" this or that meaning; rather, consciousness is what *is being intended:* The "phainomenon" as that which penetrates us and inscribes itself into us, thereby generating what we call consciousness in the first place. Phenomenology in the conventional tame sense, as our own particular method or attitude, or as the path we are to travel, gives way to a phenomenology with teeth.

When people in archaic cultures are tattooed or decorated with scars, or mutilate themselves in some way, this is a visible expression of their living knowledge that it is the essence of mankind to be inscribed and wounded, and an expression of the fact that they are a conscious part of this knowledge. Goethe stated in *Maximen und Reflexionen* that "painting and tattooing the body is a return to the animal state." Such a statement can only be made from the point of view of redeemed mankind, having escaped from the course of events to a free, "higher" humanity which, accordingly, inevitably has to confuse that part of humanity still exposed to the wind of events with some kind of subhuman nature. This can be contrasted with the view of the officer, for whom the penal system, i.e., the inscription of the body, is precisely what is most "humane and most in consonance with human dignity": only by being inscribed does a person receive his humanity.

Equating being human with suffering requires that we have to try to avoid numerous inevitable associations. Such as Christian suffering in the sense of humbly bearing one's God-given fate. There is also pragmatic suffering in the sense of that Homeric passage about the two barrels of Zeus, where the response to the depressing insight that there can be no life without suffering is the word *anscheo*, "bear it," "don't let it get you down," "keep your spirits up."[2] There is also the self-indulgent suffering of Goethe's Tasso, who says, ". . .a god gave me the gift to say how much I suffer." There is fatalistic suffering which passively and without dignity simply endures whatever happens. There is morbid suffering, which takes secret pleasure in misfortune. And, finally, there is tragic suffering in the sense of Greek drama.

None of that is what is meant here. In all these cases, suffering is construed and experienced as something which should not really occur, but with which one has to learn to live one way or another. In Kafka it is

not a matter of faithful endurance, or brave fortitude, or crying one's heart out, or of breaking down. The original understanding had already been lost in the Greek tragedies, as close as they were in time to mythic, ritualistic humanity. They are, as a matter of fact, one of the main instruments for redeeming man from the original experience of events and are an integral part of Greek Enlightenment, because they reinterpret the factual and unemotional necessity for one's being inscribed by life as a human "tragedy." They teach mankind "for the first time" no longer to experience its vulnerability as its ontological status and the distinction of its nature, but rather to conceive it as ontic suffering of one's fate: as literal injury or destruction. These tragedies are written from the (autistic) point of view of the subject insisting on his own speaking and feeling, and teach people to settle down more and more in such subjectivity. The telltale sign for this is that life is viewed in terms of literal joy and sorrow, horror and pity.

That is no point of view in the cultures based on initiation. The course of initiation is never tragic, even if it leads to death. The person is here not required to grow beyond himself through a fearful fate, because as a person he is not the center of attention. Rather, what is central is that the *inscription*—the objective meaning of the moment in question—enters ever more deeply into him, in order to be able to radiate out from him. The question is not purely negative, how to "cope" with painful events; it is the positive question of what meaning they want to inscribe into us. The torture which is the subject of the allegory of the penal colony, in other words that aspect of reality that one could call the "sadistic" meaning of history if one takes a humane standpoint, does not have to be understood literally as ontic, painful misfortune, as in Greek tragedy. Instead, this torture is ontological, it is nothing else but the acute intensity with which an actual phenomenon, regardless of whether it is good or bad, inscribes its striking essence on naked humanity.

Martyrdom in the penal colony's machine is thus a far cry from any kind of literal sadomasochism. It is a metaphor for the only way we can truly connect with the world, the way modern man, autistically enclosed in himself and his *idios kosmos,*[3] can really know that some Other exists outside of himself. Reality as an autonomous "thou" which looks into our existence and which has something to say to us of its own accord, thus requiring us to mutely listen. Only the machine's Harrow is able to penetrate the ego of our subjectivity and give us a living encounter with some Other, with a reality which we ourselves are not, neither ontically nor ontologically. It is only on the Bed of the machine that we can experience a marriage *(coniunctio)* with reality.

Similar to the situation in Greek tragedy, Christ's passion in the crucifixion is an image of the transition from a human existence based on initiation to the ontic existence of the suffering creature. Whereas the

condemned person in the penal system, after having first screamed, quiets down somewhere around the sixth hour so that a meaning can begin to irradiate, Christ's passion conversely finds its fulfillment around the ninth hour in the desperate outcry of the suffering and now *merely human* person, who has lost his God and his meaning. The image of the crucifixion instructed Occidental man to define himself as a mere creature. The former initiate now turns into the Man of Sorrows, the initiation as the inscription of a meaning becomes the Passion, naked human suffering. Redemption consists in the transplantation of human existence from the initiatory world of the "penal colony" into the valley of tears. Salvation is nothing else but being freed from initiation, being freed from the machine which would relentlessly expose us to the lightning bolt striking forth from within the imaginal depth of natural events.

Man defined as a naked creature can no longer be struck by the essence of events, he can only be meaninglessly tortured. He always has his darkest hour already behind himself (which is the only reason why Christian martyrdom could change into its opposite, triumph). His darkest hour is the crucifixion, which was the very event through which he turned into a merely natural creature. For the same reason the *crucified* Lord (and only he) is from the onset the resurrected Christ. Only for someone who is himself defined as merely natural can there be *meta*physics, *higher* truths and *absolute* spirit. Both extremes are the result of salvation from the penal machine, the result of dissociating "natural history" into merely nature here, and higher spirit there. They become opposites, just like crucifixion and resurrection, meaningless suffering and the triumph of having an absolute (supernatural) meaning. In our own concrete reality this is reflected in the fact that human dignity, which once had to be *gained* through an actual initiatory process or operation and therefore was, as the irradiance of an inner substance, an actual quality of a person, has become a (metaphysical) human *right* guaranteed a priori on paper, a *claim* which I can make on others, and on society.

When Marx says, "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it" he is confronting us with a false alternative. What good is changing the world when the person who is to change it is still the same old person? The same is true of Rilke's "You have to change your life." What good is any therapy and working on oneself, if it is performed *on* a person defining himself as the sovereign subject of his seeing and experiencing, and if the essence of that person has not been opened up beforehand into the state of existing as vulnerability, in other words, if the therapy does not take place in the penal colony? Wherever *we* want to change the world, or life, there the sovereign subject is still at work, and the realness of the real is still unperceived and unredeemed. The task is rather to *experience*, to be exposed to the impact

of, the world. However, reality has nowhere near been experienced when it has been scientifically researched, or personally felt and when our pain has been "screamed out to the world." It has been experienced only when it has inflicted itself upon the core of our being and thereby *rules.*

We have a fundamentally disturbed relationship to authority and power. This is inevitable when we realize, with respect to the metaphysical dimension, that the Christian Occident was born with the dream of absolute liberation from the rule of Being, with Christ as the symbol of that liberation (I. Corinthians 15, 24-26, "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Occidental Christianity not only strives to destroy all the *powers* of Being to which we can be exposed, with the exception of the one God. Much more radically than that, it strives to absolutely destroy the very *definition* of power and rule, and does this by having the one God *rule* who is exclusively love, exclusively good and who thus is lacking in his innermost essence precisely what makes a ruler a ruler: power and terror. The Christian God is the embodiment of victory over authority as such. The second reason for our disturbed relationship to authority and power is a consequence of our concrete practical experience with how power was exercised in Nazi Germany, Eastern Europe, Iran, Uganda, Vietnam, and many other places.

But perhaps it is less the case that authority is condemned because it is dreadfully misused in practice, but rather because authority is forced to disintegrate into its extremist distortions of totalitarian dictatorship on the one hand, and liberation struggles, revolution and anarchy on the other hand, once rule in an ontological sense is fundamentally disregarded, and thus destroyed and without foundation. We in the West can enjoy the advantage of living in a zone which is ontologically (not empirically) totally free of power and conflict, politically speaking in the zone of liberal democracy, and spiritually or religiously speaking in the zone of hope and utopia. This emancipated middle ground is probably only possible because in other places the struggle between abuse of power and liberation movements is going on in its crassest, most literal form and to hopeless extremes. And it has to wage there, because the emancipated, redeemed mode of existence cut off from authority in the ontological sense has expanded all over the world during the last two centuries, and because salvation brings about its realization specifically through a kind of division of labor, senseless subservience and torture on the one hand, and a protest against this condition in the name of freedom and human dignity on the other.

The destruction of the essence of authority as an ontological factor can be seen especially in our now experiencing power and authority only

ontically, as political power, in the realm of which our fear of suppression, exploitation, and slavish subservience is more than appropriate. The split is practically a necessity if actual authority is ignored. The latter has nothing to do with earthly rulers or political and social systems, nor with any sort of higher truths in which one should believe. It is much rather, in a naive, innocent sense, the terror with which the unmediated glance and untamed voice of the actual phenomena penetrate and impress our being. It is the sharpness with which the truth of our age cuts into our flesh. It is the claim with which the face and depth of what *is* insists on irradiating through us.

The authority of Being and the penal colony only have something to do with concentration camps if a reduced frame of consciousness forces them into the narrow confines of the ontic-political and the literal. But if the penal colony is allowed its own nature, then it is the essential location of man's poetic and intellectual existence. There is not a true writer or thinker who has not in some way or another been strapped to the Bed of the apparatus and experienced on it a marriage with the depths of reality, none who did not know that guilt *(Schuld)* is never to be doubted, that *Schuld* that consists of the debt we owe to what actually presents itself.[4]

What is this debt? It is that we unconditionally "humble ourselves" before the relentless truth of what has really presented itself *prior* to any condemning or condoning, and prior to any wish to change or improve anything. That we allow ourselves to be absolutely bound by what is, including all its ultimate consequences. That we fall silent in the midst of our speaking and wishful thinking, exalting the phenomenon's inner radiance, however it be in empirical terms. As embarrassing as this is, I have to go even further: that the actual phenenomena ultimately receive our worship as divine, because it is the essence of the *phainomena* to be *in and of themselves* the sovereign subject confronting us humans with their compelling glances of Being. Only by acknowledging its divinity is full tribute paid to the reality of each respective event, and has its whole truth penetrated us. Only then is it redeemed and released into its essence, and only then are we, too, released to any activities on our part intended to change reality.

2. The Rupture of History

> *What we know so far about the penal colony we have learned from statements made by the officer as he describes to the explorer those earlier conditions when there were executions. The officer speaks of the punishment with visible veneration and is obviously deeply devoted to the former Commandant, who created it. The officer is the only upholder of his*

legacy, ever since the new Commandant has made changes everywhere in the spirit of the "mild doctrine" which he has introduced. The officer believes that by means of his description he has convinced the explorer of the desirability of the penal system. And now with this insight the explorer must surely regard this procedure as being the most humane and most in consonance with human dignity. Therefore, the officer asks him to help him in his campaign against the new Commandant, by making a public statement in favor of this form of punishment. Then the new Commandant would finally have to acknowledge, "Old Commandant, I humble myself before you."

When the explorer declines to do this, being convinced of the injustice and inhumanity of this penal procedure, the officer responds after a moment of reflection, "Then the time has come" and looks at the explorer with bright eyes. The explorer does not receive an answer to his request for clarification; instead, the officer starts to act. He frees the condemned man who is to be executed today, puts another programming text into the machine's drawing apparatus, namely the commandment "Be just!" and himself lies down naked on the Bed, after breaking his sword. It is then almost shocking to observe how the different parts of the machine ready themselves to receive him, even anticipate his intent, and how the machine begins to operate by itself. The defective gear which actually should have been creaking as it has done ever since the death of the former Commandant, now turns without the slightest noise. Working so silently the machine can be ignored, until suddenly it begins to destroy itself piece by piece and finally becomes a heap of rubble. The Harrow does not write any longer, it only stabs, and finally bores through the officer, in an act that is sheer murder. The face of the corpse shows no sign of the promised redemption. His eyes retain a lively expression, his glance is peaceful and full of conviction. The explorer flees the penal colony headlong.

So the story's content. It has been argued that Kafka took a stance critical to the penal system described by the officer, since what visibly happens contradicts the previous enthusiastic description by the officer.[5] It is clearly shown that the assertion that the apparatus brings enlightenment is simply not true. But this interpretation cannot be maintained. The error is not in the officer's description, but in the consciousness of the interpreter. The idea of error is the instrument with which our conscious-

ness is protected from experiencing a *rupture* in history and allowed to maintain the continuity of the truth it believes in. The story's decisive turning point is the sentence, "Then the time has come." It is evidently that point in time at which two qualitatively different eras become separated: the time of the former Commandant, and the time of the new Commandant. Time has been broken and with it the truth of the times. There is no reason to assume that at the time of the old Commandant the punishment did not really lead to the radiating of a light for an entire celebrating community. But this time has now past; the old Commandant is dead.

Here, time is not an empty extent or container, indifferent to the kind of occurrences which fill it. It is an autonomous authority which prescribes a particular quality to everything that happens. What time forces us to endure is the fact that it is broken. The authority of Being has undergone a metamorphosis. The old authority has died and, as a consequence, the truth which belonged to it has become false. Now is the time of a new truth, the truth of the new "mild doctrine," namely the humane attitude of the constitutional state, based on science, technology and economics.

The rupture in history causes an unavoidable contradiction, indeed, it *is itself* this contradiction. One can remain loyal to the former Commandant and oppose any reform, which is the officer's solution, the solution of conservatism and the reactionary stance. But the conservative falls into conflict with himself. Out of true devotion to the old Commandant he wants to force the authority of the values and truths established by the former, but precisely by trying to force them he shows that they no longer *have* any authority, but are only maintained by his subjective will power. True authority is recognized by the fact that it is what actually and unquestionably rules. It neither has to be proven nor helped to triumph. By supporting the *content* of the system of inscription by means of his own will power and his various intrigues, the conservative officer reveals in his *actions* that he is himself the self-centered "autocrat" who is no longer able to suffer the meaning to be *given* to, and *inscribed* into, himself.

The reverse solution, the emancipated, progressive approach, sides with the new and, in the name of freedom and in awareness of the impotence of the old values, denies authority as such, and fights it. Here the response to the discontinuity is to make a virtue of necessity and to repress one's own devotion to the former Commandant. The progressive confuses the death of the old rule with freedom from any kind of rule at all. He, too, gets into conflict with himself, because he can only defend freedom by means of a continual fight for power over those who represent authority. Whereas the conservative rejects the *new* Commandant, the progressive is against the new *Commandant.* In both cases they are acting in ignorance of the facts. Authority is not allowed to exercise its authority because it is not granted to have changed, to have become discontinuous.

The vertical relationship of Commandant and officer—the true relationship to authority—turns into a horizontal rivalry between the party supporting the new and the party supporting the old. What was the ontological reality of the authority of Being becomes an ontic, political power struggle.

The mere fact that the machine can be explained at all shows that it is no longer what it was and according to its nature is supposed to be, namely, something one can only experience by being imprisoned in it and processed by it. An explanation of the machine is apparently only possible from above and outside, from the perspective of historical consciousness. That means that the entire ritual is in truth already a thing of the past for the officer, and his wanting it to be the present reality is pure stubbornness. The historical consciousness of the officer finds its express allegorical embodiment in the person of the explorer. The explorer represents that consciousness which, belonging to another continent, has indeed an outside standpoint and has nothing at all to do with the penal system. It is redeemed, immune consciousness. With the simple possibility of explanation from a superior vantage point on the one hand, and unmoved observation on the other hand, the essence of the penal colony as a system of relentless involvement is destroyed. The antithesis to the machine, i.e., a consciousness redeemed from it, is already present in the penal colony in the form of the explorer; it even has a place in the officer himself.

In strict contrast to what the officer is actually saying, namely that preaching is useless since the truth has to be experienced on one's own body, he himself becomes a missionary of his system. It does not convince by and of itself; a fanatic, preaching consciousness has to lend support. The system has lost its self-evident truth and innocence. The officer makes the worth of the machine dependent on the explorer's agreement, the agreement of a liberated consciousness. That this system is obsolete and impotent does not first become manifest when the explorer refuses to support it, but is already apparent from the need to woo him.

This obsolescence and impotence is allegorically made explicit by the idea of the death of the former Commandant. As the inventor of the penal system he was the soul or spirit from which it lived and through which it was authorized. The fact that he is dead means that life has gone out of the system, that it has become empty and meaningless. In actual social reality a Commandant is a more or less interchangeable incumbent of a permanent office. He may have usurped it and might not be worthy of it, so that rebellion may in some cases be justified. But in our case he is *allegorically* the authority truly inherent in and governing a situation: the real and immanent spiritus rector of whatever *is* in each case. If there is a new Commandant, then he cannot simply be the incumbent of a position of power who came from outside into a situation alien to him and now wants to impose his perhaps incommensurate ideas on it. Rather, he has to be the

explicit image for the inner truth and necessity of a given new situation. He is the expression of its essence, its ultimate, inescapable realness (authority).

Trying to resist the new Commandant would be a mere misunderstanding. It would be against nature, just like wanting to ignore the force of gravity or our own nature would be senseless: neurotic. "Resistance" here means a desire to absolutely eliminate something, a belief that the world could do without authority of Being. It thus means, in a psychoanalytic sense, defense, suppression, denial. This should not be confused with the form of resistance which we call "work": by means of—physical or moral—work I actually fight against gravitation, or my weaknesses in character, but do it ontically in the sense that I absolutely recognize and confirm those forces ontologically. Likewise, the Commandant has to be absolutely recognized, even if we have to offer resistance in the sense of "work," because he is always our *own true* Commandant, our *own* inevitable necessity, which as the *archê* of our essence or our actual life is the antecedent of all our desires. We would always be too late with our "defensive" resistance, or our agreement. This is because we are only the "officer" who never picks out his Commandant himself, but whose essence consists in obeying the Commandant who has been placed over him, whoever he happens to be at any particular point in time. Being freed of one's Commandant is not a possible goal. Having freedom as a goal is madness. The ontic work undertaken to change the world is ontologically one mode of showing obedience to it and being bound by it.

I am not speaking in favor of tyranny. Quite the opposite. Actual military dictatorships show us what horrible conditions rule because the officers, instead of keeping to their true calling by *listening* to the truth of what is and *obeying* the necessity of the times, themselves take on the role of Commandant and, just like Kafka's officer, want to force their true Commandant to his knees, in our case by force of arms. The true Commandant is not the people, the majority, either. Both fallacies arise because we misunderstand the essence of rule as political and ontic, instead of comprehending (and accordingly realizing!) the essence of politics in terms of the truth and authority of Being.

The politic and ontic misconstruction is revealed in the fact that the officer speaks of the "legacy" of the former Commandant. This tells us that the penal system is not viewed in terms of the actually ruling spirit by which it stands or falls; instead, the world is viewed from the point of view of an empirically given system, which allegedly can be preserved even after the death of the spirit which gave rise to and animated it. An empirically given spiritual legacy immediately gives rise to a conflict of opinions. The officer does not understand that the authority of Being never perpetuates itself in a literal legacy, but always only as a new, *living* power, as a new necessity

of the times. The only true "legacy" of the old Commandant is the new Commandant, simply because he is the *Commandant* and becomes, just as the former Commandant, the spirit inherent in a situation and truly informing it.

The conservative attitude of the officer has to be considered rebellion, it is essentially revolutionary. By trying to preserve the legacy, he makes himself its spiritus rector. The essence of revolution is denying the a priori existence of authority and by politicizing the idea of authority, putting man and his will in the position of the *archê* of Being. This process is reflected in the split between nature and mind/history, by which mind is supposed to be freed from the forces of nature and necessity, in order to make spontaneity (unhindered planning) the governing principle. In Kafka's story, mind and history are not some "higher dimension" in opposition to nature or the cosmos, but, in the form of the "Commandant," are themselves the very nature of Being. They are automatically a priori, are by definition the "superiors," in contrast to which human consciousness, with its opinions and desires, is only the subordinate "officer" who is obliged to obey. And conversely, nature here does not mean "outer reality"; as that which is inscribing itself it is itself ruling and penetrating spirit.

The new Commandant allows the officer to have his way, even though the latter wants to force him to his knees. He does not interfere, all he does is not appear. This illustrates the gentle government and mild power of the authority of Being. What is actually ruling does not make use of authoritarian, brutal force. It is *possible* to disregard this rule, in the way the conservative or the progressive does. The nonetheless governing power of the authority of Being consists simply in its staying absent, in the fact that the existence of a humanity which tries to get out of the spell of the authority of that which *is*, is living a lie, cut off from the glances of Being (the Gods) and their radiance, remaining inescapably tied up in some ideology, religion, substitute gratification, drugs or the like, and forced to exercise terror from above or below, in order to stay in power or to come to power.

Kafka's officer turns out to be an officer in the true sense, despite what he first appears to be, someone who listens and obeys (and that has to be the case, if we are really dealing with an allegory in which the figures actually embody what their names or offices imply). He lets himself be taught by the impotence of the old system that it is no longer what truly rules. "So you did not find the procedure convincing" the officer says, "Then the time has come." Significantly, he describes which time it is that has come not by his own speaking in so many words; he rather lets what actually happens answer the question. He thus finds a way back to his truth, by subjecting himself to a necessity. He releases the prisoner and has himself strapped into the machine. It has been said that this is a fanatic

attempt to forcefully achieve for himself at least the pleasure of transfiguration, now that for the outside world all seems to be lost. But this interpretation does not capture the meaning of his action. The officer acts out of the irrevocable insight that what is past, is past. He has understood that it is time for him and for the entire penal system to perish, thereby recognizing the rule of what is now actually in power. On his body and in his life he performs the exact opposite of what he had wanted to force the new Commandant to do. He performs de facto, although implicitly, the confession, "New Commandant, I humble myself before you," or, "he must increase, but I must decrease." This is why he breaks his sword, and this is why the commandment which he inserts into the Designer, in order to be subjected to it, is the commandment of the new times, "Be just!"

With absolute honesty the officer confronts himself with the truth of the times and is ready to suffer it in unmitigated intensity. He stops being a conservative, without becoming the other extreme, a progressive. He shows us a different solution to our spiritual dilemma (though for us it is usually reduced to a political dimension) than the solution of choosing one side or the other. He bears without reservation the trauma of the *discontinuity* of truth in his own existence. It is only our experience of suffering the discontinuity which can *mediate* between the two sides and be capable of holding them together. Only when what happens remains in this sense *psychological*, does it not have to be split apart. But as soon as the "subject" attempts to remove himself from what is happening, then the rupture is transposed to "objective" history "outside." The soul, the bond unifying what has actually happened, then has to become a separating wedge.

The new Commandant has no need of revolutionaries nor of turncoats who split off their allegiance to the old Commandant and delegate it to their inimical twins, the conservatives. He needs officers who acknowledge his rule solely by experiencing to the bitter end on their own bodies the death of the former Commandant and the collapse of his apparatus. Only in this way do they cease to be freedom fighters—people fighting for their own ego-sovereignty and self-rule—and become beings who allow their truth, whatever it may be, to be *authorized* and *given* to them by the new authority of Being.

How much the officer's insight and behavior are in agreement with the truth is seen in the fact that the gear which has creaked ever since the death of the former Commandant becomes silent as soon as the officer places himself in the machine. With the death of the old Commandant, truth had gone out of the apparatus, and a creaking contradiction entered it. This disappears as soon as the machine is no longer in the service of a dead idea, but of the commandment that meets the demands of the new times. This new commandment, however, has been designed by the old Commandant,

just as were all the others. Thus, he had himself already programmed the collapse of his machine. The fact that the apparatus readies itself to receive the officer and even anticipates his intent shows that it has long been time for his expressly bringing about the end, with determination and in full awareness of what he is doing.

By causing the destruction of the machine, the officer is obeying both the old and the new Commandants at the same time. For together the two are the one, in itself discontinuous authority of Being and they are only at odds with each other if consciousness, in order not to itself suffer the initiation into the discontinuity of history and thereby stay aloof, displaces the discontinuity, forcing something "outside" to carry it instead, whether in the form of a conversion from a true to a false state ("decadence," "The Loss of the Center" [Hans Sedlmayr], etc.) or the reverse ("progress," "Enlightenment" as emancipation from an unduly retained state of an intellectual immaturity in Kant's sense and from "prescientific" primitivity).

The officer subjects himself to the punishment procedure, but irradiance does not come. It *couldn't possibly* come, because this is the moment for acknowledging the death of the former Commandant and thus the irrevocable obsolescence of the old penal system. Since with the death of the Commandant the machine has lost its soul, it can no longer give rise to any irradiance. The illumination which the officer receives comes prior to the work of the machine on him. His illumination is the insight, "Then the time has come," for this insight brings a sudden light to his eyes (he "suddenly looked at the explorer with bright eyes"). His suffering, like the suffering of Christ, no longer has meaning in the sense of an initiation.

But we should not rest content with this purely negative result (the destruction of the machine and its initiatory meaning). Kafka's story requires us to consider further implications. The fact that the officer places himself in a machine which at first escapes one's attention and afterwards, by way of an allegorical illustration of its vanishing, falls apart, calls for a radical shift, a change in one's view of the situation. The penal colony as such has not come to an end; it is the particular form it used to have which has come to an end. What has happened is that the essential constitution of the penal system has fundamentally shifted, a shift which finds its allegorical expression in the transition from the former to the new Commandant within the *continuing* penal colony. The more the apparatus, as the particular object which *occupied* the position of the instrument of punishment in the penal system and concretely embodied the penal colony, vanishes, the more we are forced onto a higher level of understanding: onto the level where we begin to become aware of the *"position* in the system" itself. Without the position of an instrument of punishment, the system which is the penal colony would no longer be a penal colony. We are thus forced to the insight that the machine cannot have disappeared

altogether. It must rather be the case that it has made place for a more powerful apparatus, one which is not especially introduced in the story, indeed one which *cannot* even be demonstrated since it is still completely unconscious. One of C.G. Jung's experiences suggests how this is to be understood.

When Jung once asked an old African chief about his dreams, the chief replied with tears in his eyes that in olden times chiefs used to have dreams, and thus knew whether there would be war or sickness, whether the rains would come, and where one should drive the herds. His grandfather had still dreamed. But since the white man had come to Africa, nobody has dreams any more. One didn't need dreams any longer either, because now the Englishmen knew everything! Jung added by way of commentary that the medicine man who had formerly negotiated with the gods or the fates and advised his people had lost his raison d'être: The authority of the medicine man had been replaced by that of the District Commissioner.[6]

Jung does not describe this experience merely as an African curiosity, but because our own consciousness too has had a District Commissioner placed over it and finds itself in the role of the African whose metaphysical dignity has become invalid. The transition from the old to the new Commandant is exactly equivalent to the replacement of the African medicine man by the English District Commissioner. It is not the case of an incumbent of a continuing office being replaced by someone else; Being as a whole has moved onto a fundamentally different level. The traditional frame of consciousness is being broken, and consciousness is forced into a completely new, larger *dimension.*

When the instrument of punishment escapes our attention and disintegrates, this is a way of telling the explorer to become aware that the apparatus which he saw *in front of* him and which could be explained to him is no longer the real instrument of punishment. The real instrument of punishment cannot be demonstrated, because it always already completely surrounds whomever should experience it. This has to dawn on the explorer, or at least on us readers, at the latest when we see the apparatus disintegrate. The allegorical meaning of the disintegration is to urge consciousness to comprehend that the machine in *this* particular form is obsolete, that things cannot continue in *this* way, and that the memory of the events described by the officer can only have the value of a simple example, a miniature, but quite graphic model of an as-yet-unsuspected actual apparatus. There must be a larger apparatus in which the explorer has long been placed, without his least awareness.

We can only understand Kafka's story when we realize that the historical consciousness of the explorer (or our own consciousness), is not in the penal colony as a witness or spectator, as he (it) supposes, but that he (it) is what actually is to go through a rite of initiation and be inscribed.

Freeing the condemned soldier vividly shows the explorer what he himself has always unconsciously been: a consciousness redeemed from initiation in the old sense. This action is meant to make clear to him that no danger threatens him from this particular instrument of punishment, that the actual punishment has much rather to be sought on an entirely different level. And further, that the condition of "being condemned" can no longer be projected onto the soldier outside of and in front of him, but has to be realized by him himself, as his own being. The condemned soldier and the obsolete functioning of the machine are shown to him merely by way of illustration or as a small model, so that he might at long last recognize in it his own image, and so that he might awaken to the insight, what I see out there is actually myself, it is, mutatis mutandis, my own situation. The explorer, however, avoids this becoming conscious by fleeing the penal colony.

Salvation is thus not being withdrawn, but it is rather transcended. The condemned man is really free, and the explorer remains redeemed. But that is precisely what is truly disturbing, since it shows that precisely *because* salvation is not revoked, now, under the new Commandant, "punishment" has to be expected in an entirely unanticipated dimension. We should not forget that the new Commandant is also the Commandant of a *penal* colony. The onward leading motif of the new Commandant (who represents a completely new penal system) is unmistakably incorporated in Kafka's story, but it cannot be explicitly unfolded within it simply because the explorer's consciousness, and ours, too, upholds its defense against such an expansion of consciousness. No wonder that Kafka was unhappy with the conclusion of "In the Penal Colony" and drafted several other endings. Indeed, an important aspect of the entire work has not yet been brought to conclusion.

What was once an apparatus bringing illumination can, now that the officer has been butchered in it, only be a part, such as Harrow, or Designer, of a new, much more extensive and hardly fathomed apparatus. Accordingly, the new prisoner or initiate clamped into this larger machine is not the officer, but, as mentioned above, the explorer. The new initiate is us, modern, European, civilized consciousness which with one hand fights for freedom and justice and with its other hand pages through books about ancient myths and rituals; calling with one voice for peace and "green" harmony and with its *very own*, other voice supporting the expansion of a technological economy and the construction of bombs. The officer places himself instead of the prisoner in the machine not in order to himself experience an initiation. He certainly knew what to expect, which is why the expression on the face of the corpse could be "calm and convinced." If he had wanted to forcefully bring about illumination for himself, then the result would have had to be an expression of the most profound

disappointment. No, the officer lies down on the machine as a part of the drawing which the new machine is supposed to inscribe on the explorer, or on us.

What kind of a drawing? It is the image of the disintegration of the old apparatus, which inevitably accompanies human salvation from punishment/initiation; an image revealing that the commandment, "Be just!" does not bring illumination; the image of the dull death of the "officer," that part of man which *obeys* Being and which now has become a meaninglessly martyred naked creature; above all it is the image of countless gassed and murdered victims of concentration camps, the image of all the murdered Cambodians, of millions of gaunt, starving people, the image of human life strapped into medical equipment, unconscious and merely vegetating; it is the consciousness of the pollution of nature, of the threat of atomic disaster and of a technological genetic catastrophe. The drawing inserted in the new machine no longer has a positive content; it is neither commandment nor inspiring symbol. Its text is the rupture of history itself, the loss of familiar meaning, indeed of the entire *level* on which meaning formerly existed. Its text is the message of the absolute indifference and worthlessness of individually ontic mankind.

The former Commandant, or the medicine man, represents a system in which each individual had an ontic meaning which supported and fulfilled him because he participated in the myths, symbols and rites of his community. He represents a being in which the universe is a cosmos, the earth a holy mother, in which plants, animals, rivers and mountains, even the tools he produced, are inhabited by spirits, fairies, nymphs, gods and trolls, and thereby possess inherent metaphysical dignity. But ever since the District Commissioner is on the scene as colonial master, the entire system of individual initiation, of a personally experienced meaning and of the ontic satiety of each moment with mythic richness has become a thing of the past. An individual person may still have his own personal dreams and symbolic experiences, and he can probably go on hikes instead of driving a car, or weave cloth, can food and make his furniture in the old way, instead of buying industrially manufactured products. He can personally abstain from exploiting nature or being part of a consumer and throw-away society. But along with his abstinence and imitation of what is outdated he has lost his metaphysical authority, at least as far as his highest determination is concerned. The individual objects of the world, earth, heaven, water fountains and fire, sun and moon, wind and mountains, have all become hollow of meaning and banal. They have been stripped once and for all of their mystery and their numinosity.

The place of decision and fulfillment is now on a superior level. The District Commissioner makes decisions according to the administrative principles of a modern empire, taking no note of the world of the medicine

man and his fellow tribesmen, and acting beyond the horizon of an individual person. In precisely the same way our swift highway and air traffic fundamentally and "inconsiderately" race past and over the heads of pedestrians and horseback riders, radio and television waves override personal conversation, and industrial manufacturing supersedes the hand-made objects of the past. The world's present being has surpassed its former being, just as an imperialist colonial power overcomes native tribes, in keeping with the alchemical saying of Pseudo-Demokritos: Nature rejoices in nature, nature conquers nature, nature rules over nature. The individual, ontic person is thus relieved of his ultimately metaphysical responsibility, and thereby redeemed, but that is precisely why he is also released to the indifference of "free time." Inside we all carry around with us an African medicine man in metaphysical retirement, who in all essential regards is functionless and who, if he is honest, as far as the meaning of life is concerned is left only with the nostalgic memory of what he has irrevocably lost, something he can only keep in the mortuary of a literal museum on the one hand, and in the mortuary of an unending, imaginary museum called the historical consciousness on the other hand. Jung hits the nail on the head when he says that the particular African chief with whom he had this conversation was not in any way an imposing personality, but rather a whining old man. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely for that reason, he was a visual and impressive representation of the subterraneously spreading collapse of an *obsolete and forever irrevocable world.*[7]

It is precisely the psychotherapist who repeatedly has to painfully experience this irrevocableness. To be sure, it is not a rare occurrence that the punishment apparatus called analysis truly gets going, and perhaps the analysand even begins to understand, after the "sixth" hour, as in the times of the former Commandant, and his face may begin to shine—but there is nobody around any longer who would sun himself in the glow of this irradiance. The celebrating congregation which could convey to this event a public commitment is absent. The analysand takes home with him the illumination as his own personal experience, and the world remains unmoved. The old Commandant is dead and the new one keeps his distance. The still possible individual, ontic experience of meaning only takes place in the Garden of Epicure and only has the rank of a leisure-time activity, without ever touching what is really happening in the world, much less changing it.

It really seems to be true that the metaphysical ground has collapsed under us inasmuch as we have the status of ontic individuals, and that the new level of humanity's Being is now located one floor down, on that level where the District Commissioner or the new Commandant rules as the current truth of the times. Individual consciousness is simply not the true

correlative of a reality which is characterized by the resolution of the previously experienced world into atomic and subcellular structures, data bits and statistical probabilities, by communication media passing over the heads of individuals, and by a global economy which is no longer transparent. Only a fundamentally different kind of humanity can match the spiritus rector which rules today. The explorer or the medicine man can only be initiated into the new level of his human-ness, if he confesses with tears in his eyes that he has lost his metaphysical raison d'être as far as his ontic individuality is concerned, and only if he lets himself be inscribed by the image of the officer who is in obedience to the Commandant in fact and compellingly displays, much like Jung's African medicine man, the absolute downfall of the individual person and of the ontic numinosity and imaginal richness of the world. This new level of human-ness would be the abstract one of his *Essential Being;* on it he would exist as the archetypal *anthropos* beyond his personal, ontic individuality. And only then could he again be connected to the course of events and the place of decisions. With our individuality and as the empirical personalities which we are, we are no longer the subject or the addressee of events. What is taking place today (atomic physics, telecommunications, aerospace activities, data processing, gene technology, aviation, etc.) is not something for which individual, "responsible" scientists, industrialists and technicians, can take responsibility, nor is it addressed to the individual person as its natural "contact point." Even if the course of events can only occur through the medium of individuals, the actual "metaphysical" subject of the event is something else, something much more comprehensive, because individuality has become obsolete as to metaphysical substantiveness and at best is only the servant of the actual subject, only the "boy" of the District Commissioner.

The terrible problem of imperialism and exploitation, which is the dark side of salvation, freedom, and the constitutional state, cannot be adequately addressed if we attempt to solve it "out there," on the ontic-political level by means of an antiimperalist struggle. This fending off merely solidifies the problem in literalness. We must first of all and primarily experience imperialism as something that was done to us ourselves at the deepest level of our being, and not only to others, Africans, Indians, Australian aborigines, the European proletariat. We have to experience that all of us are and have been for a long time in ourselves the freed prisoner or the medicine man relieved of his raison d'être, and are not only the "colonial-master consciousness" of science and technology. We have to suffer imperialism psychologically, in ourselves—suffer it to *be!*—and allow ourselves, *before* we do any condemning or approving, and *before* attempting any changes and improvements, to be unconditionally bound up by it as the actual *truth* which has long been ruling over us, but which we have so far suppressed. It is too late to resist (ontologically

understood) imperialism; it has long been ruling over us and in us, it already inheres in what wants to resist it, so that resistance would only perpetuate it. We would be naive to think we could rid ourselves of it simply by an antiimperialist struggle. It is *really* a reality and not only an idle, because mistaken, opinion. We cannot get rid of realities; we can only expressly subject ourselves to them and thus perhaps modify their influence, or even change them into something desirable.

The symptomatic, inferior and ugly form of imperialism is the unrecognized preliminary form in which our new Commandant, the new rule of Being, is hidden. Imperialism contains a call to us, the call to free this new thing to be itself. Imperialism, which is indeed objectional, is itself the impulse to let it enter our being and to fully recognize it as our being (and not, for example, our moral guilt): to honor it, rather than to literally act it out externally *on* others as the exploiter or exploited, or, as revolutionaries, to fight it externally *in* others, in both cases warding it off. Imperialism is not our guilt, it is our Commandant, our master. As the invalidating and overcoming of ontic individuality (medicine man) and the world's ontic richness in meaning by the colonial rulers (the "imperialistic constitution" of the scientific-technical-industrial world), imperialism is actually the misunderstood arrival of the principally higher dimension of the *ontological*.

The course of history itself requires us to recognize the ontological level as the new foundation of our existence and to suffer the unavoidable explosion (or collapse) of consciousness from its firm foothold in the ontic into the depths of the ontological dimension. To use another image, it requires us to abandon our fixation on individual demonstrable and rearrangeable "things" in "space," and not even to rest content with a "minor expansion of consciousness" in the sense of discovering new rooms or floors in our soul's house. It rather requires us to become aware of the spatiality of space, of something which even contains within itself this entire house and all its already-discovered and yet-to-be discovered rooms, of something like the atmosphere in which we live as a matter of course without taking special note of it. And the task is not only to become aware of it, but also to translocate our being from the level of something which is always *in* a space to the level of spatiality itself.

The explorer does not become fully conscious of himself as that person who himself is in a much higher sense what has been demonstrated to him by way of an external illustration in the form of the condemned prisoner. But he vaguely senses that ***he*** is meant, that ***he*** is now the one to be inscribed. That is the reason he attempts to escape by flight. But he can, of course, only escape from the old penal system. The new machine, as his *ontological* essence, is so large, it so completely surrounds him, that even his flight can only take place within it. Without suspecting it, the explorer

has long been strapped onto the Bed of the new machine, which is as in Kafka's text well padded with modern salvation and freedom, and his flight is merely insignificant jerking within his bonds. The Harrow consisting of those painful images accompanies him wherever he goes, fitting itself snugly to his body, however he may twist and turn on the Bed of his machine.

In the same way that the condemned prisoner in Kafka's story impassively and uncomprehendingly endures what happens to him, the modern consciousness of the explorer stands ignorantly vis-à-vis what is happening and attempts in a variety of ways to defend itself against the pain tearing him apart and caused by the harrow digging into him, in the mistaken opinion that he can escape a collapse which has long taken place, or can expose it as something unreal. Similar defense mechanisms are, for example, appeals to our ethical responsibility and our emotional concern, political and social activism, confessing our guilt and arrogance, stubborn insistance on human rights, clinging to a religious or philosophical belief, the conservative's condemning the loss of tradition, secularism and socialist activities, or the liberal's condemning irrationality, mysticism, and imperialist forces. All these are attempts to keep out of what is really happening—which is the breaking away of the ontic basis of our being and our collapse down into the unknown, underworld depths of the ontological—while nevertheless mediating between the redeemed consciousness and the factual, now indisputable existence of the new program diagram now operating in the machine. But the ignorance of the person exposed to the apparatus and his clinging to the traditional perspective oriented towards his ontic mastering of life is part of the essence of the machine, which is always beyond one's horizon and which has long started to work on the person strapped into it before he even notices what is happening to him and, especially, before enlightenment begins to come to him.

Apparently, the sixth hour has not yet arrived. Modern consciousness has not become quiet, not quiet enough for the truth of the times to resonate and irradiate through and by means of it.

References

1. Franz Kafka, *Briefe* 1902-1924. *Gesammelte Werke.* Ed. Max Brod, Frankfurt, New York (S. Fischer, Schocken Books) 1958, p. 150.
2. *Iliad,* 24, 549.
3. "One's own, private world." Whoever has an *idios kosmos* is considered to be an idiot. The private world meant here is, however, not the world of isolated individuals, but rather the commonly shared world of the modern collective consciousness. It is an *idios* kosmos in the ontological sense: it is a "private" world defined by a person who is doing the seeing, a world which is essentially different from the world of the *sensus communis,* which was a reflection of what was presenting itself to, and looking into, human life.
4. Is perhaps this unpaid debt the reason for today's literal tortures? Torture and political mass murder as the compulsive return of a suppressed rite of initiation in the form of

concrete action on someone else, amidst a world of redeemed humanity?

5. Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka—Tragik und Ironie.* Munich, Vienna (Langen/Müller) 1964, p. 107ff.
6. C.G. Jung, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*, ed. A. Jaffé, Zurich, Stuttgart 1967, p. 268ff.
7. C.G. Jung, *ibid.* p. 269, my emphasis.

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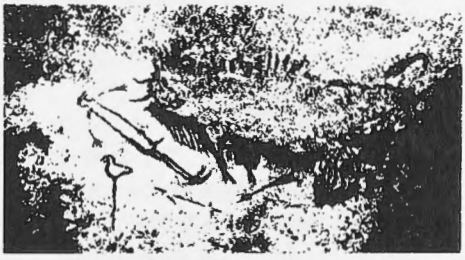

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PAMELA WYE

LASSIE NOT: DOUGLAS QUACKENBUSH'S DEAD DOG PHOTOGRAPHS

I wrote this piece while sitting on a gazebo by the Wallkill River in New Paltz, New York. The woods around me teemed with creatures squawking, rustling, cooing. A chipmunk scurried down a tree and yakked at me, making eye contact. Without the relentlessly soothing voice of the PBS nature series to narrate my experience, I became alarmed: will the chipmunk scamper up my leg and bite me? will deer charge at me? will an eel leap from the river and cause me great pain? Will they all, as they do in cartoon movies, band together in interspecies unity to chase me out, intruder that I am?

When I drove around New Paltz, birds swooped across the street at windshield level just as my car approached. One bird fluttered before my hood then executed a nose dive with a thud into my car's chrome grill. Meanwhile, a dead deer stretched out on the median strip, its head peacefully on the edge of the pavement. And each morning, I awoke to find a blanket of moths in my bathtub that drowned or spun down the drain when I ran my shower. "Murderer!" I heard the chipmunk scream. "Murderer!" joined in the deer, the garden snakes and the bird's friends.

Why do animals seem murderous when I'm on their turf and suicidal when they're on mine?

We think of animals as either wild, domesticated, or manufactured—at home in nature (where they seem to dominate), at home on the couch (where we try to dominate) or at home in plastic wrap in the meat section of the supermarket. But there are also the lost souls of the animal kingdom who are homeless and wild in our urban habitats. It is this fourth, anarchic underclass of animal that Douglas Quackenbush identifies with in his powerfully gruesome and beautiful photographs of a dead dog that span seasons in the life of the corpse.

Born in Michigan in 1930, Quackenbush came to New York in 1951 as a jazz musician. In 1959, he embarked on a series of photos of the East River Park Amphitheater, then the site of popular free concerts. In 1994, he exhibited these photos alongside recently rephotographed shots of the same views (minus the crowds). The images of the now abandoned and decrepit site are like 35-year time-lapse photos documenting loss. If the

photograph freezes a moment in time, Quackenbush is able to thaw the moment and allow its future to seep out into many more photos that reveal the evolving (or more often devolving) process that resides within the singularity of the moment.

In the late 1960s, while residing/squatting in a quasi-abandoned building near the Brooklyn Bridge, Quackenbush was aware of a forlorn abandoned female dog whose demeanor markedly perked up when a particular male stray came into her life. The male stray moved into her box next to the Brooklyn Bridge and Quackenbush noted their happy roamings in the neighborhood. Returning after a night photographing rock groups, Quackenbush found this male dog dead on the street, apparently hit by a car. Having experienced a recent setback when equipment problems prevented him from showing his 1964 series of Thelonius Monk photos at a Museum of Modern Art screening, Quackenbush felt himself a failure and in the grip of a nervous breakdown. Based on the dead dog photos that were soon to follow, one could surmise that he was, while crossing the bridge that night, ripe for the process of identification with the most marginal of lost souls. And in his devotion to a process he could not foresee, he reversed the unconditional loyalty of the domesticated canine and became a dog's best friend. What odd loyalties grip us at certain moments in our life! Accompanying some particular creature as far as one can through the portal of death and then further into our own imagination, is a poignant companionship.

Not intending to photograph the dog, Quackenbush spent the rest of the night looking at him. And in something out of a Disney movie, in which animal characters regularly marry and have stable domestic lives, the female stray joined in the vigil. Quackenbush decided to take one photo in a blue light. This first photograph shows the dead dog laying at the intersection of perpendicular cracks in the pavement in an "X" that marks the spot of intersecting destinies. Quackenbush then lifted the dog from the pavement and laid him in a nearby empty lot. The original photo didn't come out blue enough, so he returned to reshoot the dog. Someone had thrown a stick on the body, so Quackenbush removed it and shot its imprint.

That was in January 1968. Quackenbush walked by the lot everyday and inexplicably became enmeshed in a process, reflecting on his own life, on what was happening in the U.S. (the war in Viet Nam, racial unrest) and photographing whatever happened to the dog. Quackenbush related to the dog's cradled position as though he were holding him like a child. He developed every photo on every roll of film, he'd hawk his camera to buy more paper to print, using every camera he could get his hands on.

The winter snows preserved the dog. In late winter 1968, Quackenbush shot the dog at night during a wet snowstorm with a time exposure by

snowlight. In the spring, weeds sprouted around the dog. A Quackenbush journal entry from the time reads: "It is my birthday. They are burying Martin Luther King and there are maggots in the mouth of the dead dog." Radio announcers were saying at the time that King had been "shot down like a dog." Quackenbush started researching the dog as underdog, and his idiosyncratic photographic images became metaphors for the power struggles and violence that were exploding in American society at the time. The warmer weather also brought the smell of decay. Quackenbush made a conscious effort to overcome his repugnance by mentally transforming the smell of death into the smell of all living things combined. The tall weeds eventually obscured the dog, leaving a negative space within the weeds where the body was visible by its absence.

Quackenbush discovered that Walt Whitman had lived in a building that once stood on the site of the empty lot. And the Eagle Storage Building next door had been home to the *Brooklyn Eagle Newspaper,* where Whitman sent his dispatches from the Civil War. In fact, these moving photos do have the morbid, semi-sacred quality of photographs of quiet Civil War battlefields, where dead young boys look like they're napping. Like the dead young boys, the dead dog image is far from the happiness and benign domesticity that we associate with youth or sleeping dogs.

In the Fall of 1968, the empty lot, with its urban greenery and garbage, was cleared to make way for a gas station. In the process, the body of the dog was severed from its head and removed from the lot. The head remained. Quackenbush continued to photograph the dog's head with the imprint of his body still fresh in the ground. The construction workers jeered him. The scene around the dog had always been a changing one, with debris blowing in or people anonymously leaving behind various objects. Quackenbush took these varied manifestations as indications of people's feelings towards death. A beer bottle was left, he believed by one of the workers, on the head of the dog, only to be replaced the next day by a milk carton filled with flowers. As construction progressed, and gas tanks were buried in the ground, the dog's head became harder to find. So Quackenbush took photos of what he saw during his search for the dog. In fact, the dog's head, half covered with crumbling mortar and exposing dry bone, resembled the debris of the site and becomes harder to find in the photos. The eye begins to see the dog's head everywhere as though in a morbid Rorshach Test. In the winter of 1969, debris from the area was bulldozed into a huge hole in the ground, and the dog's head went with it. It was the first time the dog had been moved since Quackenbush had laid him in the empty lot.

Quackenbush originally showed his dead dog series as one long continuous slide show, involving two projectors and hundreds of slides, each dissolving into the next. This mode of display harkens back to that

distinctly '60s medium—the light show. In fact, during the 1960s, Quackenbush assisted in the production of light shows for various artist/hipster parties. Yet, rather than the fluid transmogrification of the psychedelic light show/spectacle, the dead dog series confronts the viewer with the brutal realism of plodding transformations wrought by death, decay, and business.

New Paltz, June 1995

DOUGLAS QUACKENBUSH

EIGHT PHOTOGRAPHS

DOREN ROBBINS

THE INJURY IN MY MOUTH TELLS ME

Today even standing in a cut rag
Mrs. Penser in 5th Street Market,
and all the nose and eyelid rings—today
people enchant me their way, parade their pain
their holes
down to me worthwhile in rings, in skin, in a coat
ripped down the back. Even the injury in my mouth
tells me to look, points to me what
to listen for, as though listening had not yet been enough,
and I had never really seen what putting holes into yourself,
or getting holes, could be about. We are full of holes,
no matter what Mrs. Penser will not say, no matter
her deformed fingers, no matter which Gestapo jail guard
creaming his pants twisting pliers on her hand and will never
be found. Even the smell of your dogs on you today
or the canary that used to sleep on your pillow and dirty it
for your care—also a pleasure dear to you—
even standing as you rock while stroking
your Spatzie, adorable white-pawed stray dog, your own eyes
closed Mrs. Penser. No matter what holds my upper body hair to
[me,
I stir coffee with an arm clogged into holes, the green formica
my elbows row into the granules of, plywoods of poison
[adhesives
delaminated in one ruffled corner where a layer parted its lid
so the dust of the glue could enter me. No matter what smoke
blown chain-smoked into blue numbers, no matter whose wrist
made part blue, etched blue, it was all holes when I looked.
No matter what, I let her graze her cold hole into me,

all her stumps, three yellowed crushed nails row on my hair and
[my hair
sucks onto them, glad for nose and eye lid rings, glad
her death camp fingers are unshawled by gloves—
glad for nipple, glad for foreskin, glad for labial hoops.
Glad the dishonesty didn't work, glad the relatives prohibiting
the urge to look, glad their trying to contain the impulse to
[shudder
didn't work. And Mrs. Penser, bending down to nurse me in the
[dream,
her bra full of staples and roaches. No wince. No blame.
Glad I noticed my mother's stricken reassuring look,
picking up dishes through her long-haired hole, stroking Mrs.
[Penser's
knobby shoulder while she dexterously lit cigarettes
with her two regular fingers, in the room with the pools
of all their smoke, a room of stacked holes. Glad
the stacked cigarette coupons she and her husband
would buy some tool or appliance with no other way,
swept down from a cluttered end table
to the oval burgundy rug—glad they remain,
everyone staring or starting to reach for the coupons
scattered the way I left them from my movement
to break away with my cousins running
to the other room, away.

HERBERT LUST

IT WISH IT WERE

paranoia
how exciting how exquisite
just think enemies into every bush
ambush behind every tree
at last it would have status if paranoid
it would be paid to attention
how magical how vegetable
quite different from it zero now
it don't have squat in worry
no one to stab it in back
—it can't figure it out—
either it no back
or back too small to stab
which O which
it turn it imagined back at least 14 times each day
insides onward hope it be stabbed
"hey" it yell to a friend
"stab it in the back,
it wouldn't put you out so much"
the friend, "yeah but all that takes energy
it isn't worth it
anyway I've this other friend to stab in back,
he claimed he had an idea"
it ask "what about?"
"oh I don't know what but he has an idea
he said it would put him ahead
so I wish him dead"

*

each human too armored to a forever
no way set set set any doubt
doubts inappropriate for genius
so friends have fears but no doubts
they friends know everything what a relief
even though everything led them into deep shit
this deep shit still essence to their genius
their deep shit a superior mystery
deep shit perfume and diamonds
yet this all a blessing in magnificent reverse
for as hope removed frustration
removed to pain removed
a void created pleasure seeps in
thus dead hope is all
no is the new hope for it
so then life resumes it grow
inside a no

*

it wish it were
but the truth is it love people
it love the wonderful way
people can bear the suffering in others
for example one friend stand up with another dying
there is fast and slow dying
slow dying is uncalled for inconsiderate
the real victim is friend forced to watch
this creates a long bad memory
slow dying forces friend forever live with death
indeed adding insult to injury
so if you are dying be a good friend
be quick at the end

*

in fact it wish it were a coward
rather than present half way breath
suffered all life trying to brave all around

until to another it to it prove it big
a million between eyes always searing down
ah cowardice, all your beyond blessings could free it
think about it O courageous reader
no one ever expect diddly-squat from coward
it a coward it so disgusting
ah that it were even more
no aspirations in hold it back
0 at last free to unknown track

*

for example it was in love with it first wife, Franja,
which wife cheated on it with it best friend
then went off and married it next best friend
it next next best friend said
you make too much about it
women are like a train
one leaves another is wait
you are taking all this too personal
a train is a train
some bring joy some are slain

*

in New York a friend is some one
who can be fucked quicker than an enemy
once an almost friend said to it
and thank for his incredible honesty
"you shouldn't be so upset about our argument"
why
"because you are among my 200 best friends"
oh, how many friends do you have
"two thousand or more"
so gore

*

it wish it were
if so, what relief

nothing with people except the without
what called accurate just something less inaccurate
disinterested acts are mental suppositories
conjured up to relieve constipation in despair
that's why wish it were
there would be nothing left to think
every face which approach it an assassin
it still expect everything from friend
the slightest pat on head
and it face turn red

LINDSAY HILL

THREE POEMS

LEADERBOY

Leaderboy bait-sweet strolls among the sate-holes
He do that maskless grab-fandango dance
Scissor the glandular scent-scape ridden of poke
Leaderboy flash his nail-enamel luck
Parlay them back-pipe kisser-cogs on show
Their fawn-self parasite-parts obscured in styles
Leaderboy hole-hunt open-action-drive-train absolute
He ply that lawless viral inside war
He have that action on them all the time
Them pleasure-holes and money-holes complete
He know they cannot be guarded
When they open themselves to eat

CAR LOT LEADERBOY

A squat make a tentative toe-hold on the lot
Leaderboy sight it side-swipe swift and move
His heat-seek coils in a plastic survey mode
Leaderboy sidle the shag
Do a syrup-spurt at the hear-hole part
Make his fingers meat-fork wide and flash
Them eat-hole cutter-caps full-blind

Start that narrowing-caliper roller-talk
Cod begin to bridle and remorse
Leaderboy tack with a pout and reassure
Shimmy the wipe in a rust-white low-ride van
Gullet the hide with a cloy-clamp endocrine close
Pop a money-shunt on the pocket-purse
Suck it out like a egg-sack wasp on go
Leaderboy make a lip-light grooming coo
Route the cob on exit into traffic
Smooth his hair back light and fresh as magic

LEADERBOY IN LOVE

Leaderboy yoke him a she-sweet money-sock
He have a dazzle loose-knit way of talk
Goes: We got all the fluid drives in common Palmy Rump
Her earlier stick he haul behind and murder crisco-slick
Have his pant-hose on her in a jiff
Her hind he calls his heart-beast jellyette
Out loud he nicotine her yap-slot shut
Lose a finger up her semi-sweet
Piewaypoundapoundapound
He make things marvel
She tight her to him like a tattoo net
He drop her like a snizz-wipe two weeks wet

Breaking the Surface: Recent Works of Kenward Elmslie

The Broadway Musical is an endangered species. London's West End still mounts dozens of revivals and original plays in the classic modes, while in NYC there may be three uptown musicals—and these Pop-cum-Disney extravaganzas such as *Cats* (poetry putting on alley drag to escape its second-class citizenship), or *Les Miserables* or *Miss Saigon*. Taking up some of the slack are such unclassifiables as the "operas" of Robert Wilson and others working in his wake, works which combine high spectacle (giant cat's legs crossing upstage, unremarked), high "seriousness," and the (strange to say) saving grace of a lack of discernible attitude toward their "subject matter" (if such there is). "Operas" of this kind are non-narrative, offer unconnected dialogue, even solfeggio. The waning of the classic musical gives us as Americans fewer opportunities to examine ourselves: its relation to our culture is both a celebratory and a critical one, its confections given body by tweaking topical references and a shorthand vocabulary that takes for granted its audiences recognition of the amusing/absurd ephemera that surrounds them. But laughing at one's foibles or those of others is no longer a permissible American pastime, and—even while admitting that economics is surely the largest factor—this may in part account for the musicals' near demise.

For an interested onlooker can't help but feel there is an aspect of the triumph of demotic leveling in the form's passing from favor. Unlike the kind of dramatic theatre-of-empathy poet/playwright Bertolt Brecht called "spiritual dope traffic" (at random: say, *Death of a Salesman),* many musicals are casually subversive of empathetic identification, keeping their buoyancy by way of a kind of ironic or even mocking detachment which can seem to an unsympathetic ear to operate from a place "above" its often populist subject matter. The Mega-musicals mentioned above avoid this by a number of devices—cuteness, or technical bedazzlement or a flavoring of two-reeler quality melodrama in their plots. (The large liquid eyes of the waif on the poster for *Les Miserables* are its flag of allegiance.)

But if both ornate language and ironic distance are on the outs on Broadway, they are alive and thriving in the prose and drama of poet/librettist/playwright Kenward Elmslie. Elmslie continues to write musicals with a classic lyrical beauty. From *Night Emerald*, Elmslie's musical-in-progress on Oscar Wilde, here is Wilde's wife, Constance:

> Don't let him mold you
> As he tried to mold me.
> Don't let him shape you, frame you,
> With chisel and brush, rename you—
>
> An objet d'art,
> His Objet D'Art.
>
> I was his Dresden statuette,
> His willowy Rossetti.
> Charades I shan't forget.
> Tableaux Vivants. Confetti.
> Frozen in time,
> He found me sublime,
> An objet d'art
> His Objet D'Art.[1]

That Elmslie's poetic language is descended from his Broadway show tune lyrics has been noted (though this is by no means the *only* source he has mined; Wallace Steven's surface of "glittering nonsense" is also important, as are others. . .), but that the approach to emotionalism in his poetry and prose also owes something to the emotional strategies of the musical theater has been overlooked. Elmslie's Cafe Revue percolate-it-down expertise helps him achieve the speed he desires in his writings—but the glitter and wit has often put such a sheen on the surface that it has re-/de-flected the eye away from most of the emotional content of his work. *Night Emerald* is one of Elmslie's most emotionally direct works, but however well we might understand Constance's warning in the song above, stripped of its music the lyric can seem too rococo for direct impact.

Once freed from the (voluntary) concessions to music and first-time intelligibility, this allusive showbiz language can grow much denser. Here is the unmistakable Broadway sound and eye-rolling expressiveness, but with the more expansive descriptive freedom offered by the prose page:

> Monday, over Kiwi Whiskey Sours, Lulu railed against bifurcated epicene formalism. Tuesday, over Kiwi Boilermakers, she fulminated against the ossification of *La Scuola Metafisica*

site-specific sculpture. Wednesday, over Kiwi Cuba Libres, she skewered the stylistic ghetto of day-glo parabolists, struggling to inject iconic mystery into funk Surrealism. Thursday, over Kiwi Old Fashioneds, *animalier* imagists provided a ready-made target for her diatribe—how dare they attempt to deaden viewer involvement by illusionist artifice and perspectival distortion! Friday, over Kiwi Moonshots, Lulu, flailing at the art world in general, complained to her husband Bubu, "If I see one more mnemonic fragment, cathartically gestural, where the dialectics between inner calm and outer chaos implode with an institution-sized tautology, I'll—I'll—." The Ming vase shattered on the rec-room parquet.

In this tale, "Nouvelle Kiwis-'N-Art" from *26 Bars,*[2] the emotional outpouring is of a tone, as with so much Broadway, that it can't be taken seriously. The carrying-over of this ironic tone has long meant, however, that much of Elmslie's non-theatrical prose work has been taken as detached or farcical even when it was not meant to be. What seems at first to be a mocking distance is, when looked at closely, a kind of modesty: while the sound is that of a broad burlesque the attitude is one of self-conscious undercutting of the voice's self-importance. It is this mixed emotional message, as much as the slippery verbiage, which can make it difficult for readers to identify with the underlying feelings in Elmslie's writings.

The poetry is somewhat easier to feel our way into than the prose. While it is often even denser than the prose, the poetry is more tonally and emotionally integrated—in part because the poetry generally is the sound of *a* voice, a direct address, where the prose is composed with the dramatic dictum "show, don't tell" in mind. In the poem "Local Branch" we read:

Sun, wind, gamma wavelengths, wind sun.

Luscious disarray thrusts out, up and at 'em.
They natter away, fending off devourers whatever their tech.

Calipers have categorized zillions of odor lingos,
filaments with rhythmic dialects you and I'd kill for,
survival subterfuges experts still file under GUNK.

Database in superb shape despite cutbacks. Warehoused.
I can attest the last oral will power ode just went off camera—
how to eke out a leg-up when I sleep cruddy, the Fed.
I chowdown good, piss on the grass, shit razorblades A-OK.

This is the specialized vocabulary of the pop science pages, here given a spin to produce a spring pastorale. Through the dense language we hear the sound of dawning happiness, of cautious optimism.

Using much the same kind of language, but instilling it with a lot of isometric cultural wit ("isometric" because it exercises a part of its own force against another part, as in Lulu's art world quandaries above) Elmslie can also detail a civilization running down, consuming itself, as in "YX," the twenty-fifth of his *26 Bars:*

> . . .Errata get wedged in spark plugs from computer dust. Computer dust'll do that, once it gets in machinery. Motes hang on for dear life, onto the fumes rampaging in the Siamese standpipes all over any city, ghetto and high-rise. Through keyholes. Onto pillow. Fluffing only aggravates the destructive force in our midst. If only we could find some stalwarts to jut shoulder to wheel, a common crusade, tribal. The generator the spark plugs activate must date back—hmmm. Back to when women were threatened by hairy paws. Men too, but not many. The rub is, you can only go to the well only so often only, in one and only life only, setting aside for now the poss—
>
> Would you object if we skip past contingency plans involving frou-frou in an afterlife?

Elmslie's characters, for all their wild improbability at times, for all the verbal motley that festoons them, are particular and culturally precise. Elmslie's writings are, among other things, histories of our time. And an awareness of the plague of our time has figured in several recent works. Often taken as an extremely stylized, *l'art pour l'art* writer, Elmslie has now surfaced as the author of a series of emotionally wrenching works, produced with only a slight refocusing of his trademark gumbo of argots and tone swings. Striving to come to grips with the AIDS epidemic, with considerations of that final awkward age, that of approaching death, Elmslie's emotionalism has broken through his bright surface in the musical play *Postcards On Parade*, the memoir *Bare Bones*, and the prose rumination "Champ Dust" with its art collage offshoots.

Postcards On Parade is by no means "an AIDS play." It concerns itself with many things—is in large part an investigation of obsessions, of the detritus of nostalgia, and, above all, of fighting for one's emotional well-being using whatever means might be at hand—even the humble postcard. But one of the threads followed in the play is that of a gay couple, one of whom is HIV positive. The facing up to mortality intrudes on the song and

dance of the musical in this (here condensed) letter-writing monologue by the afflicted character, Kevin:

> Sorry 'bout this, Tim. The scoop is: a terrific future awaits me. It's like winning a screwball once-in-a-lifetime lottery. I get to join great gang of guys and gals, simpatico compadres such as you and I, plus some Top Ten Biggies. We've been handpicked. We're known collectively as the VIP Positives . . . .Klutzy corpuscles dog-paddle in my polluted bloodstream, going nowhere fast. Olympic virtuosos they're not . . . .My corpuscles give good slapstick, period. As hilarious as a one-armed ice-skater on an oil-slicky rink littered with banana peels, trying to screw a light bulb, which my klutzy corpuscles think is a "life bulb," into a life-support system gone bonkers. . . .Which describes my current situation. . . .[I]t would take a genius, part Kafka, part Sam Spade, throw in Sam Beckett, *The Book of Job, Moby Dick*, Leonard Elmore—or is it Elmore Leonard, plus ten thousand episodes of *The Young and the Restless* to cope with my system's daily round—shoot out, coup d'etats, terrorism—a level of violence and subterfuge the CIA would give its eyeteeth to attain. . . .The City of Me's days are numbered.[4]

A unity comprised of such a wild clash of emotional tones is not unique, but everywhere around us: Yiddish theater at times includes a pair of clowns who appear on stage during sad scenes, and do comedy as tragedy occurs center stage (a device that influenced Kafka); and in the American Southwest some religious ceremonies of the Pueblo People include "sacred clowns," who mock the actions of mere men as compared to the gods; the parodic elements of their roles even allowing them to act at times as a kind of "ethical police." And "real life" itself certainly abounds with volatile emotional mixtures. But Elmslie's hybrids are exceptional in the extremes they embrace—the registers he climbs and descends seem hardly to be part of the same emotional world, or at the very least that of a sensibility fragmenting itself to cope with all the relentless emotional "incoming" raining down in its "City of Me."

It is worth turning aside briefly to note that Elmslie lists Bertolt Brecht as one of his influences. He cites Brecht, in part, for his political stance. (Though rarely overtly political now, Elmslie characterizes himself as having been a "Park Avenue Commie" when younger.) Both poet/playwrights produce[d] works very much of their time and national situation. (Should pages of Elmslie's or Brecht's work wash ashore,

undated, at some great future remove, a culturally aware reader could likely place the writing of the works almost to a specific year, so strong is the grasp of both writers on the forces both threatening and clowning around them.) Brecht lived in a Germany where hobnail boots walked his city streets, while Elmslie lives in a USA where stunted sensibilities and sanctioned selfishness rule the range. Brecht's stance was naturally more extreme, but no more accurately reflective than is Elmslie's. And Brecht's theater was based on more than politics. He looked beyond specifics and characterized the Germany he lived in as "ordered disorder," where even the most common events refuse to lay comfortably in a context, but remained "Hard to explain, even if it is the custom. Hard to understand, even if it is the rule."[5] This is also true of the world Elmslie's characters move through. Drawing from his fragilely balanced surroundings Brecht developed his notion of an "epic" theater. "Epic" not meaning Mega-theater, but in contrast to "dramatic" theater, where all the parts are drawn into an artificially-straight storyline. With Brecht's "epic" works, with their structures of interruption one can, as it were, take a pair of sheers and cut them into individual pieces, which will remain fully capable of independent life. Where Brecht used songs and captions to break up his plays, Elmslie employs tonal and language shifts to the same end. (Parenthetically: such a structure may harm the work in "dramatic" circles, but this is precisely what helps a work become a "cult" play, or book, or film, et al. And Elmslie and Brecht are, indeed, both "cult" authors.)

Elmslie *can* write with copper cent simplicity, as in *BARE BONES*, his small book memoir of the life and death of his longtime friend, artist/poet Joe Brainard:

> He accepts the unacceptable.
> Where does such deep grace come from?
> We discuss our respective deaths.
> Ashes,
> Field uphill,
> Us Both,
> Ashes scattered,
> Flesh ash, bone ash,
> One day commingled,
> Under white pines,
> An enclosure Ron calls "druidic."[6]

But this straightforwardness is an anomaly, a one-of-a-kind born of a terrible loss. Written in the same period, the prose rage of "Champ Dust" is more directly in Elmslie's "line." Here he foregrounds his sense of wrenching pain, and sets it in the near-prehensile urban menace of his

surroundings. Closely related to both *Bare Bones* and the AIDS-impacted parts of *Postcards*, but much denser and darker, "Champ Dust" has the author facing both the mortality of his friend, the "Lost Boy," and the onset of his own aging. The characteristic argots and lingos abound here, but for all the snake dancing of the language, the emotional weight can only be called straightforward:

> In the entrails, skateboard whiz, my shadow friend, has been trussed into an epoch of vin ordinarie and heartless individuation now rage among hot role male model—street-smart but brain-dead. What the fusion magazine states is: experts must come down harder on Lumpy Harriet and her ilk. Not ethical, spoiling quality time daylight hours. No safe turf, now monsters of the night penetrate the winter screens, infiltrate our personal water sports, take a dump on our never-to-be-fondled sateen ensembles, abscond with upscale exotica luxury items—Lamborghini Romeo & Yseult conversion vans to die for—and they don't even have operator permit or bother to deign semiotic foreplay ads in their verbless nounless salt mine dialect of whimpers and grunts, but what really pisses me off, Lost Boy, Lost Boy, oh darling soul mate, forgive this hyper riff, is they just won't help us develop a basic long-term strategy. Brood about this on rainy summer afternoons. Energized by mistaken identity Lost Boy mutants.[7]

While Elmslie's tone even here evidences some of the persistent insouciance that is a chop mark of the supposed "New York School," his sound is a dark hybrid—a sort of mystery thriller spliced into technical reportage; very precise but with a heightened dramatic quality that can make the reader squint, as at film noir.

The play's "City of Me" here has become the entire world, a horrible urban grid where the victims are shunned or abandoned. (Elmslie here gives "society" a number of unusually sharp kicks.) To read "Champ Dust" is to be lidless in sight of the modern world, to don virus [sic] reality goggles with arms pinned to your sides: all the fear and anger and sadness are presented with LCD garishness and injected directly along the short nerves from the eyes to the mind. There is rage here, including rage at the onlooker's helplessness, a rage not so much inarticulate as hyper-articulate, the deepest feelings being forced out, its language pained and clotted, intensely private. The reader has to fight the impulse to step away from its violence.

The intensification in the move from *Postcards On Parade* to "Champ Dust" is taken a further, more physical step with "Champ Dust Smegma."

Here Elmslie has literally torn fragments from the text of "Champ Dust" and collaged them with snippets of old-fashioned comic postcards, so that one page of the work offers the deconstructed acrostic "Antsy scenario / shrouded D / E snoozing / behind the tormentor / fornicating with T / up in the flies / H harnessed / under the drop cloth / Diaghelev, I'm not," with torn edges visible, set in an arrangement of comic fat lady on a table, Rube Goldberg-ish old man onlooker, and silhouette in a snappy cap.[8] Other fragments are set among rabbits popping out of hats, and amid trotting skunks. If *Postcards* is the beginning of the descent chronicled in these three works, then the postcard art of "Smegma" is evidence that Elmslie has come to terms with his tragic subject, bottomed out with the harrowing rage of "Champ Dust" proper, and brought that rage back up through the language surface, up where he can face it squarely, finally tame it, force it to jump through hoops of his choice.

Read individually, each of these recent pieces offers a compelling experience. Read serially, they show a writer of (Brechtian) epic scale.

Notes [All works by Kenward Elmslie, except where noted.]

1. "Objet D'Art." Printed as part of "Six Segments from 'Night Emerald,'" in *New American Writing* #8/9 (Fall 1991), pp. 220-221.
2. *26 Bars*. New York: Z Press (1987), p. 87.
3. "Local Branch," in *o-blek* #10 (Fall 1991), pp. 52-53.
4. *Postcards On Parade*. Flint: Bamberger Books (1993), pp. 67-69.
5. Bertolt Brecht, *The Exception and the Rule*, in *The Jewish Wife and Other Short Plays* (Eric Bentley, trans). New York: Grove Press (1965), p. 111.
6. *Bare Bones*. Flint: Bamberger Books (1995), p. 15.
7. "Champ Dust," in *The New Censorship*, v. 4 #12 (March 1994). With reprinted drawings by Joe Brainard.
8. "Champ Dust Smegma," in *Mirage* #4/Period(ical) #36 (November 1994).

(*Postcards On Parade* is being workshopped. A ten postcard version of the art collages, to be titled "Champ Dust Spinoff," is due to appear from the Alternative Press, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

—W.C. BAMBERGER

Erasing Modern Poetry

On one or two occasions I have reported on publications, events or developments in the profession of literary and cultural studies for readers of *Sulfur*, with the idea that not all of the readers of this journal have at least one hat in the academic ring and may be curious. But here's a story even

the academics among you probably don't know. A couple of years ago an historian, Joyce Appleby, was touring Asia and noticed that many of the libraries there were weak in their holdings of American books. She was mostly concerned with books on history, economics, business, political science, and the like, and remedying this situation became something like a mission for her. With luck that surely won't be duplicated in the near future, she managed to convince our government that it ought to do something about the situation and made enough noise to get Congress to vote 2 million dollars to buy books. The OAH (an organization of American historians) soon became involved, and the job of making the libraries happen was passed to the United States Information Agency (USIA). This is one of the things that the USIA does—cultural "outflow" I once heard it called. At the USIA, a scholar-in-residence, Andrew Lakritz, recommended that the list of books be expanded to include literature, philosophy, and other subjects; the OAH had apparently assumed that literature was already better represented than, say, history, especially in Eastern Europe. The USIA farmed out the job of compiling lists in literature, philosophy, and a few other subjects to the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), providing them with a 27,000 dollar grant to be used presumably for release-time for preparing the bibliographies. I am concerned here only with what happened to the list of books in American literature. For all I know the lists compiled for history and so forth are just fine. But what happened to American literature is an abomination.

One assumes that the scholars the ACLS contacted to construct these lists were not mere flunkies, but rather some of the most influential and powerful people in the scholarly community. Steven Wheatley of ACLS told me on the phone that each list was sent to a group of scholars who made selections; these lists were then reviewed by other scholars. So when it turns out that such committees of academics have erased nearly the whole of twentieth-century American poetry and fiction it can hardly be an accident. Indeed, the American literature list is a powerful indication of trends in the profession today. I 'll limit myself to a discussion of the contents of that list, since it is my first concern and presumably the concern of many *Sulfur* readers.

So what's on the list the ACLS finally submitted to the USIA staff, a list containing some 310 volumes? What will students and readers at academic institutions like Hankai University, the University of Peradeniya-Kandy, Maduri Karamaj University, the University of Lodz, and many others—places where the local writers may be languishing in jails—have available now in the way of American writing? Well there's lots and lots of criticism and scholarship, and many expensive bibliographies of Jewish-American, African-American, Chinese-American, and Chicano literatures. There's Stephen Sumida's *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of*

Hawaii, Mary E. Young's *Mules and Dragons: Popular Culture Images in the Selected Writings of African-American and Chinese-American Women.* At $95, there's *Fifty Southern Writers After 1900: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook.* There are three books by Houston Baker, Jr., two by Cecilia Tichi, and of course there are the two volumes of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, site of an emerging canon and orthodoxy. There are three volumes by Zora Neale Hurston, two by Jack London, one by Toni Morrison—her essays rather than one of her novels. And for twentieth-century American poetry the ACLS list includes—beyond the limited and very problematical selections included in the second volume of the *Heath*—a mere four books: Frost's *Collected Poems*, Stevens' *Collected Poems* (filed under Wallace in my copy of the list), William Carlos Williams' *Selected Poems*, and Adrienne Rich's *The Fact of a Doorframe.* No books by Pound, Eliot, Niedecker, Crane, Oppen, Olson, Duncan, Lowell, Merrill, Bishop, Baraka, Creeley, Reznikoff, Zukofsky, Rukeyser, O'Hara, Bronk, Loy, Hughes, Ginsberg, Stein, Tolson, Fearing, Moore, Brown, H. D., Spicer, Rothenberg—you name it. Sure, there are a few poems by Pound, Moore and others in the *Heath* (the post-1945 selection is much weaker), but one wouldn't want whole books by these poets, right? **NO POETRY ALLOWED, ESPECIALLY MODERNIST AND POST-MODERNIST POETRY**. Even the criticism and scholarship on contemporary poetry is left to one book each by Charles Altieri, Alicia Ostriker, Susan Schweik, and Rich. For fiction the folks the ACLS put on to this task have done nearly as great a disservice to works already secure in an international audience—not a single novel on the list by Djuna Barnes, Kay Boyle, William Gaddis, Vladimir Nabokov, John Hawkes, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, Cynthia Ozick, Ishmael Reed, Donald Barthelme, or Paul Auster. One could go on but the omissions are very depressing. If the Library of America volumes weren't included—the whole set is part of the list—one wonders whether even William Faulkner would have made the cut or been left to his representation in the *Heath* anthology or in some scholarly reading.

Now don't get me wrong. It's not that I have a problem with any specific book included in the American literature list—I haven't read some of them. Nor do I even particularly object to the "multiculturalism" that seems to inform the list, though in this version, as too often, what we seem to have is an insular and provincial "multiculturalism" thoroughly ignorant of some of the more internationalizing and cross-cultural developments in twentieth-century literature. Gerald Early has made the point before: "Despite cries of 'inclusivity,' a certain obvious provincialism pervades muiticulturalism." Such provincialism is on view even in some of the more prestigious academic press journals, though there are exceptions of course, just two of which I'll mention here in case you don't know of them (they are perhaps less known to *Sulfur* readers than some others). There's the

Oxford University Press journal *Transition*, edited by Wole Soyinka, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., truly a model for a multi-disciplinary journal dedicated to a readable prose and a range of interesting subjects. Then there's Robert von Hallberg and Lawrence Rainey's Johns Hopkins University Press journal *Modernism/Modernity*, with scholarship in modernism across the arts and nations—a journal that represents the antithesis of the insular multicultural provincialism I mentioned above. In the review section of its most recent issue, Harvey Teres ends a review with words that might be applied to the agendas of many in power in today's academy as they are busy constructing orthodoxies while babbling platitudes about how great life will be in their world, where they have supposedly put canons aside. Here's Teres: "The curious eye, the power of description, the fitness of a chosen word, the adequacy of tone—in short strategy, device, and influence—are sadly neglected. Someday the story will be told how a generation of academics, convinced that the current social arrangement precludes quality lives for the majority, could become so blind to the rare examples of quality that survive so many morbid symptoms today."

As things go, the story of the USIA-contracted list does have an ending better than it might have had, thanks especially to Andy Lakritz. He had the good sense to recognize the ACLS list for the crap that it was. He asked me for suggestions for books of poems and novels, and I compiled a list of some seventy-five collections of poems and novels (and criticism of the same) that might be added. I wish I might have added more, but I was worried about budgets, and didn't know if I was free to erase any part of the existing list. Andy went ahead and deleted some of the more expensive bibliographies and the merely fashionable scholarship and added still more poems and novels. But this ending should not make *Sulfur* readers too happy. Neglect of modern poetry and fiction in the academy is on the rise, and scholars are more and more convinced that what's happening in American writing is happening only in their own books.

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Pig Press

Together with North and South, Reality Studios, and a few others, Ric Caddel's Pig Press is one of England's finest small press publishers of poetry. Since 1972, Caddel has been working to put out handsomely-produced editions of selected American poets and a number of the best British and Irish poets. The print-runs typically are small—about 400—but in a poetry world where Simon Armitage's greased-up Larkinesque verse, meant for reading between business appointments, makes him one of the most popular poets, you don't expect the likes of Barry MacSweeney, Allen

Fisher, Kelvin Corcoran, Gael Turnbull, and Elaine Randell to sell in bulk. Most of Pig's books are now available from SPD in Berkeley, and I want here to mention three of the most recent—Catherine Walsh's *Pitch*, Maurice Scully's *The Basic Colours*, and Roy Fisher's small pamphlet *It Follows That*.

Walsh is a young Irish poet who lives now in Eastbourne, having also recently spent time in Spain. A collision of cultures and languages—Sganish, English, Gaelic, Dublin slang—is evident in the volume, which is comprised of four middle-length poems, the first of them beginning with a Spanish lyric sounding a good deal like something by Alfosina Storni or Delmira Agustini, though I haven't been able to trace a source and it may be by Walsh herself. She works in small, shifting units of meditative and descriptive fragments, a modality sometimes faintly reminiscent of some of Tom Raworth's poetry. Alternating line-length in discontinuous blocks of writing she circles around a number of concerns historical, personal, domestic, political, and otherwise. In her visual text it is possible that the influence of Susan Howe's work is manifest. There is an emphasis on poetic process and the erasures and omissions of the text as they compete with the "inability to let go of moments/ time phases":

> how to distinguish those portions
> still valid
> from those
> superseded
> (his whiteness) ( ) (his scales)
>
> the stillness
> for any new movement
> simply
> acquisition of information
>
> something important
> about blood

Walsh's form is capacious enough to contain a small song like "o glad snow" and produces provocative juxtapositions of an abstract, conceptual poetic discourse and another, more emotionally direct idiom, as in the following passages from near the beginning of the second "Pitch":

> blame the way out-arked mythified in the long
> line of throes and chaos to decentre can involve denial
> of experience legendloded bits demand the act
> deny self this is irritatingly dense

I must be busy bell rings
in a coloured ball on
a ribbon frantically
thumps the wall

At times like this, the text seems to unfold as an articulation of its own processes in a kind of parthenogenesis of the sentence, or as set of open, intensely self-conscious and self-swallowing meditations at high velocity. But there are other, more descriptive and image-laden moments in the poems, as the poet seeks to make lists, to name things and places even while cognizant of the fact that such activity is "heavy with / denial of loss." There is a past in Ireland (on the dole perhaps?), a baby (who's tossed everything out of the cot by now), and perhaps also some tension between a text wanting to celebrate the "unknown" and a desire to end in some slightly less dislocated posture—as the "Pitch" sequence does, "half the way/ home/ on one/way streets."

There are any number of American poets who write something like this:

realize
this is not memory
conditions
the state of the subject at
the moment
in question being

making pictures
to walk into wide
edging on

But there are fewer Americans, I think, especially among the avant-garde, as interested in exploring the few remaining viable elements of a pastoral tradition. And yet such a tradition enters into the third "Pitch" in the volume, which follows the second's fragments on Dublin: "past spring groves beech chestnut bog-oak/fairy ráth wild fruit clumping/hassocks of long bog grass[.]" I'm tempted to say that I prefer this last, most sensuous section of the poem, but one can't neglect the other two "pitches," the first of which pushes toward a flurry of exploded fragments and accents in an effort to—if I can borrow from two different parts of the text—"dredge the zest" from a "stasis/in the/face of more/instants." Even as her text keeps slipping away from me into its many fragments and lists, each word an event, the pace of the poem determined not just by length of line but also by the size of textual blocks and the willingness to indulge a syntax, there is an emotional

residue left behind, a variety of complex tonalities too rarely found in the more monolithic ironized play of many experimentalists.

Maurice Scully is an Irish poet roughly ten years older than Walsh, and his poetry does share a little with hers beyond the refusal of self-important certainties and propositions. At one point he quotes from a postcard the phrase "Anti-rational emotionalism lives on," and this seems a fair-enough credo for his poetry, which is finally more wary, consistently self-deprecating and even "anti-intellectual" than Walsh's, less "self-reflexive," more given to a continuity in its movement if only a little less elliptical. The book is framed by two poems, the first referring to and the last quoting from a story by the children's writer Enid Blyton: "all the little cars were grey." Sentiment and charm confront a guttural, stoic laughter. Between the framing poems there are sequences of what Scully calls "sonnets," all of them interesting but none more so than the first from a second "site"—"On Site: B"—which engages Lesotho culture. This poem is a kind of dialogue in which an italicized "voice"—we meet it first in the book's first poem—responds to another "voice" intent on getting inside the "beat" to "catch it precisely/ not bend it smooth it out/into Literature or Song or Art. . . ." Scully does, at times, work close to song:

> & so the little flowers
> bunched up &
> spoke to me & this
> is what they said
>
> how are yr friends
> they said
> are they all dead
> they said
> we heard they were
> you know, & feared. . .

That won't do, however, so the italics tell us to grimace and flip to another page. In other poems Scully works closer to prose:

> wigs stiff with grease, white mercury
> rouge, mice, misery—I can't stand it!
> I must. cave painting is not art/later
> that sickness. history: a grammar. make
> the present perfect—leave it!
>
> mentally nodding, shaking the head, wanting
> out, out of here, most of the time, voting

for Inside when Outside counted the cards,
a blundering puppet locked into the template,
an idiot, a stupid. . .a fool, a blithering
thick, I. . .

. . .I have nothing to say about that.

Persona and personality are part of the game in such "emotionalism" and it's hard not to succumb to the sympathetic magic of Scully's "pattern ache vanishing into life's pixels," where what is *is* "& that was that." Pretension and Art—with the big "A"—are the enemies. One poem tours a gallery:

parquet

picture parquet

square wall

picture picture picture picture picture

DOOR

I've read few books lately that offered such unabashed pleasure, such a small but precise complex of joy and resignation.

The highlight of Roy Fisher' s pamphlet is "A Modern Story," a literary barb aimed at the British Arts Council. As readers of the late Eric Mottram will know, the Arts Council has for many years done everything it can to suppress or ignore innovative writing in England. Fisher has had perhaps a little more visibility than some poets of his generation, but if you believe as I do that some of his longer poems, especially *A Furnace*, are among the greatest poems of the last thirty years, then you'll appreciate this grim, savagely funny fable. It tells the story of a "poet" awarded one of the Arts Council Literature panel's "five bursaries." But the poet can't write with the money in hand and so decides to set up a poetry competition, where the real money's at. Pretty soon he's got enough to buy some vanity presses, and then he's rolling in it. Eventually a man comes around and offers to sell him the Arts Council Literature Department itself:

"NO deal," I told him. "I'm a straight business man now, not a gangster."

And the poet hands him his remaindered books. An easy joke maybe? But how many of Roy Fisher's books have been remaindered? And why isn't this poem in one of his Oxford University Press collections?

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Red Sauce, Whiskey, and Snow
is the title of August Kleinzahler' s latest collection, out from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. One might have picked other titles—"Winos in the Dappled Light" comes to mind, as one or another form of Hopkins' word "dappled" occurs several times in the poems. Ultimately Kleinzahler is a romantic sensualist, a hedonist whose soft raptures are regularly disturbed by urban banalities and sleeze, or by noise from the TV:

> The earth
> after a fortnight's thaw,
> loosens, loosening some more
> until a musty bouquet
>
> digs a small trench in us, light
> playing on pebbles and clods,
> traceries in clay.
> Suddenly car doors,
> jets and *the brutal slaying in Queens*—
>
> morning rinsing the shadows,
> pouring out day.

Kleinzahler has pitched his tent between the fiefdoms of Basil Bunting and Thelonious Monk, and there is no questioning the great formal skill of his poems—the tone-leading of vowels, the small and angular dislocations of syntax, the rhythm of the phrase:

> Under the tailings and slag
> the salt burns down,
> through clay, through schist
>
> and boil in the stream
> where the little lamb drinks
> slaughtered for meat

He is probably a little more dependent on the noun and the noun phrase than his master Bunting, a little weaker in the verb, and he is certainly more willing to let the voices of urban and suburban chaos into the poetry. Many of the poems are small perfect artifacts, but one wonders a little about their content, or rather Kleinzahler's treatment of their content. Jimmy the Lush down guzzling poison at the park and talking away, or some street-person mangled on the sidewalk outside a restaurant strike me as finally unhurt and harmless, bathed in a Kleinzahler persona that contains as much milk as acid. They aren't the broken people of Baudelaire's "Tableaux Parisians" and they aren't likely to become the militia folks talking about fertilizer. One might compare Thom Gunn's powerful "Old Meg" in *The Man With Night Sweats*, which ends with an old demented woman turning to the poet and telling him "Blood on you!" and Kleinzahler's more quirky "Outside the Restaurant":

> My lady pulled my sleeve
> to see
> the squat man on the sidewalk
> near
> hand on his joint,
> under siege by terrible gravity
>
> pulling him down
> pulling him down
>
> . . .
>
> turned,
> galling his bones
>
> turned back to us
> and said
>
> acid,
> dark as a witch:
>
> —*So long, beautiful.*

This is "authentic," one supposes, and I always admire the poems for their movement, for the noises they make, but the New Jersey guffaw that is the posture of this and other poems can seem at times almost as canned as Jimmy Cagney. I'm worried about picking at these poems because the skill with which they are made is great, and the Catullan and Villonesque

traditions and sensibilities are important to me. See, for instance, the energetic rewriting of Villon in "Going":

> Look at Sinatra and Reagan,
> dewlaps trembling in the wee small hours,
> glued to *I Love Lucy* reruns
> as the Secret Service men doze.
> They own cliffs and enormous stretches
> of desert, those two—
> shopping centers, distilleries.
>
> Lucy is dead, boys, give it up:
> Desi, the Duke and Ava,
> dust;
> even little Sammy's
> checked out.

The same tension between pastoral bliss and urban bile so evident in much of Kleinzahler's work can be found in Bunting, though in the later poems it is resolved or anyway integrated in ways that Kleinzahler has not yet managed. Kleinzahler should give the boot to poems like "A Case in Point," which blasts others (poets perhaps? language poets?) whom he despises for "backing off from the authentic." The poem is nearly as predictable as Yeats' "The Scholars"—Kleinzahler has another poem in an earlier volume written in the wake of that cheap shot. But there are also indications of new directions in form and subject matter in this substantial book—narrative poems, satirical readings of high European culture, the Gulf War poem "Crunching Numbers," others. Kleinzahler's is an immense talent that seems as if it might need someone or something to push him beyond what he already does nearly perfectly.

**My thanks to my friends William Walsh and Ted Maier for conversations of considerable value in helping me read Catherine Walsh—no relation!—and Maurice Scully.

—KEITH TUMA

An Anthology of Anthologies

The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry, edited by Jay Parini, 750 pages from Anne Bradstreet to Louise Gluck, is being heavily promoted as the new standard; it's even a Book-of-the-Month selection. For *Sulfur* readers, it will only be of sociological interest for those who are amused watching the glass-enclosed elevators of literary reputation. Thus, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Olson, Creeley, and Duncan have now been admitted, but they are grudgingly allotted one or two pages each. Oppen, Rexroth, Spicer, Blackburn, Everson (among the dead) are still nobody. Of *Sulfur* contributors, only Ashbery, Snyder, Ginsberg, and Baraka are included. The major living poets are, according to the page-count, Levine, Ashbery, Pinsky, Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Fame in America, as ever, is once again proved fleeting: prize-winning major poets of yesterday and today such as the Benets, van Doren, Gregory, Zaturenska, Karl Shapiro, X.J. Kennedy, Kizer, Kumin, Logan, Simpson, Dugan, Bly, Meredith, Swenson, Hugo, Howard are history, and Merwin (called "William S." as he was in the 1950s) gets slapped in the face with a single page, no better than some avant-gardist. Meanwhile Teasdale, Wylie and Winters linger on, and a host of future unknowns are introduced.

In the new Multi-Culti world, there are many more women and African-Americans than there used to be in such books—particularly a lot of (usually justifiably) forgotten women from the 19th century—but the redressing of imbalance does not extend to Loy, Stein or Niedecker. Among the women, there is one scandal and two surprises: Dickinson still remains too radical for these oak-panelled walls: though praised in the introduction, she's given less space than Longfellow and, almost unbelievably, her punctuation has been "normalized" (as they used to call it)—even now, after forty years of the Johnson edition and a thousand monographs on her dashes. (Would a *Columbia History of Art* put black bars across the nudes?) Moore and Millay are definitely in the UP elevator: Moore, in number of pages, is the third greatest poet of the century, after Eliot and Stevens (followed by Frost, Lowell, Merrill and Pound); and Millay gets the same space as Williams.

The brief introduction is most notable for this piece of Newt jingoism: "The modernist movement in poetry was largely American in its origins." We also learn that Imagism was "founded by Amy Lowell and H.D. and joined by Ezra Pound," and has been an important influence on the (otherwise unmentioned) Language poets, and that *The Cantos* "has failed to convince anyone but a few isolated critics of its greatness." The book, unusually for a university press publication, contains no bibliography or any notes on the individual poets.

But there's more: I became interested in the book after a glance at the table of contents. Charles Olson was represented by one short poem, "Poem 143: The Festival Aspect." This happens to be a poem I included as part of the Olson section in my anthology, *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators & Outsiders.* Buried in the third volume of *Maximus*, it is little-known: not included in the Olson *Selected Poems*, or reprinted elsewhere. There was no way in hell, in thicket, that another anthologist—particularly one with no apparent interest in Olson—would have independently selected the same short poem from Olson's vast work. Clearly Parini had read my book.

I started checking out the other poets whom we both include, and found various cases where Parini repeated part of my selection for an individual poet. Some of these were not terribly unusual: poems by Baraka, O'Hara and Zukofsky that are not often anthologized, but are not especially obscure. The give-away was a poem by Rukeyser, "Iris": I had pulled it out of her huge *Collected*, both as a poem I liked and to bounce off a poem by Sobin called "Irises." Rukeyser's "Iris" has never been reprinted in an anthology, and isn't even included in the new Rukeyser *Reader.* The other poem in Parini's Rukeyser section was "Then I Saw What the Calling Was," also an unusual choice. I had a hunch Parini hadn't discovered it in the poet's own books. When I tracked it down—in Fleur Adcock's *The Faber Book of 20th Century Women's Verse*—I also found Parini's complete selection for Josephine Miles.

Small wonder I began to wonder what other anthologies Parini had been reading, and, limiting myself to the 20th century poets from James Weldon Johnson to Louise Gluck—assuming their "canon" to be less petrified than the 19th—I compared selections. It turned out that, with merely a cursory search through a handful of other books, I could account for two-thirds of the poems and almost two-thirds of the complete or nearly complete sections for individual poets. One-third of the poems were taken from Richard Ellman's *The New Oxford Book of American Verse.* If we add Ellman and Robert O'Clair's *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* we have nearly half the poems. Even more blatantly, in a book that pretends to be a new multicultural reading, all of the Native American poems came from one anthology, Duane Niatum's *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*, and all of the poems for six African-American poets (and most of a seventh) are from the old 1938 James Weldon Johnson *Book of American Negro Poetry.*

These anthologies were apparently supplemented, to a lesser degree, with poems from J.D. McClatchy's *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry;* Stuart Freibert & David Young's *Longman Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry;* and Robert di Yanni's *Modern American Poets: Their Voices and Visions.*

Here's the breakdown:

Selections entirely or largely drawn from *Oxford:* Vachel Lindsay; Robinson Jeffers; T.S. Eliot; Archibald MacLeish; e.e. cummings; Hart Crane; Allen Tate; Delmore Schwartz; Robert Duncan; Denise Levertov; A.R. Ammons; Sylvia Plath; Carl Sandburg (3/6); H.D. (4/6); Conrad Aiken (2/3); Elizabeth Bishop (4/7); James Merrill (3/6).

Selections entirely or largely drawn from McClatchy: W.D. Snodgrass; Galway Kinnell; Anne Sexton; Robert Hass; Randall Jarrell (2/3).

Selections entirely drawn from Weinberger: Louis Zukofsky; Charles Olson.

Selections entirely drawn from Johnson (African-Americans): James Weldon Johnson; Paul Laurence Dunbar; Claude McKay; Gwendolyn Bennett; Arna Bontemps; Countee Cullen.

Selections entirely drawn from Niatum (Native Americans): N. Scott Momaday; Simon J. Ortiz.

Selections entirely drawn from *Norton:* Jean Toomer; Marilyn Hacker.

Selection entirely drawn from Adcock: Josephine Miles.

Selections entirely or largely drawn from *Longman:* Donald Justice; Nancy Willard; Charles Wright (4/6).

Selections entirely drawn from di Yanni: Robert Creeley; James Tate.

Selections entirely or largely drawn from combinations of these anthologies:

Oxford plus *Norton:* John Crowe Ransom.

Johnson plus *Norton:* Langston Hughes.

McClatchy plus *Norton:* Richard Wilbur; Gary Snyder; Theodore Roethke (5/8).

Weinberger plus *Norton:* Frank O'Hara; Allen Ginsberg; Amiri Baraka.

Longman plus *Norton:* William Stafford.

Longman plus McClatchy: Robert Hayden.

Adcock plus Weinberger: Muriel Rukeyser.

Oxford plus McClatchy: John Berryman (5/6); Robert Lowell (6/7); James Wright (4/5).

Oxford plus di Yanni: Robert Frost; Ezra Pound; Marianne Moore.

Oxford plus di Yanni plus *Longman:* Wallace Stevens (9/10).

These are the sources I could track down in an afternoon; it is probable that a more diligent researcher could find more. [The poets I couldn't find generally fall into two groups: women from earlier in the century—Amy Lowell, Teasdale, Wylie, Millay, Adams, Riding—which possibly indicates an anthology I missed, and contemporary poets, many of them Parini's

colleagues at Bread Loaf, whom it must be assumed that he actually reads.] To the inevitable response that many poems are "canonical" or "anthology pieces," it's worth noting that for certain poets—among them, Stickney, Williams, Penn Warren, Brooks and Rich—Parini has clearly made his own choices. And it's interesting to compare Helen Vendler's *Harvard Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry* or Hayden Carruth's *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*, which, covering many of the same poets, rarely overlap with Parini. McClatchy and Ellman are quite different, and even Ellman (the secret and unwitting co-editor of this book) going from the *Oxford* to the *Norton*, only repeats himself half the time. Love them or hate them, it is obvious that Vendler, Carruth, McClatchy, and Ellman—or, more recently, Paul Hoover and Douglas Messerli—have done what an editor of an anthology is supposed to do: offer a reading pitched between history ("canon") and an evident personal taste, based on a fairly thorough knowledge of the individual poets. With the exception of a few poets whom Parini obviously has read in depth, his book is, far beyond coincidence, a half-hearted recapitulation of a few other anthologies. This may not, strictly, be plagiarism, but it's as close as an editor can get.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

Complexities of Witness

In his review of my book *Under World Arrest (Small Press*, summer, 1995), Michael Duff contests the effectiveness of a poem on the beating of Rodney King (a video that was replayed for weeks, King beaten again and again, in contrast to the almost bodiless Gulf War on TV). He also dislikes some poems he does not name which "excoriate American leaders." I am not particularly bothered by Duff's criticism, since I know that the political poem in America is always in a state of disputed effectiveness. I would like to take his comments as a point of departure to reflect on some of the problems that arise when a poet attempts to, as directly as is possible, address war and violence at large.

Robert Duncan wrote some of the most commanding political poetry of the late 1960s—in particular "Up Rising" (linking Johnson with Hitler and Stalin, as Johnson intensified the American bombing of Vietnam) and his variation on Southwell's "The Burning Babe" (written in 1595), in which

Duncan responded to horrifying photos of napalmed Vietnamese girls which had been suppressed from *Ramparts* but published in my magazine, *Caterpillar*. Yet Duncan's response to a Denise Levertov poem ("Life at War") about the same war was to charge Levertov with projecting a personal and unresolved problem into what many readers felt was a realistic response to the war. "Delicate man," Levertov wrote,

> still turns without surprise, with mere regret to the scheduled breaking open of breasts whose milk runs out over the entrails of still-alive babies, transformation of witnessing eyes to pulp-fragments, implosion of skinned penises into carcass-gulleys.

In a letter to Levertov (quoted in her essay, "Some Duncan Letters—A Memoir and a Critical Tribute"), Duncan quoted this stanza and commented: "the words in their lines are the clotted mass of some operation . . .having what roots in you I wonder? Striving to find place in a story beyond the immediate."

In the same period, Duncan also attacked James Dickey (in Duncan's essay, "Man's Fulfillment in Conflict and Strife," in which he justifies writing "Up Rising" and discusses its background and borrowings). Citing a few lines from Dickey's poem "The Fire-Bombing," Duncan wrote: "'The Fire-Bombing' dwells on [Dickey's] own fantasies, fed by his actual missions over Japan in the Second World War. . .the poet projects an exultant and fearful inner reality. . .exultant in his hostile cravings for destructive power."—as if Duncan, as the author of "My Mother would be a Falconress," did not have a "fearful inner reality" of his own!

In both criticisms, Duncan proposed that Levertov and Dickey were mainly revealing something ugly about themselves. Levertov was responding to news reports; Dickey was recounting what Michael Palmer would call a witnessing (which involved the fire-bombing, by Dickey and others, of Japanese villages).

It is hard to say who has more subjective room. Levertov has the whole range of news information, and one could argue that such a range of selectivity allows for a greater subjectivity on her part (through which projections can emerge). Yet anyone following the war in those days with a critical eye toward what our government was doing knew that Levertov was not making up sliced breasts, pulped eyes, and skinned penises. Via the network established by some 500 NYC artists involved in "Angry Arts," we knew that stuff was going on over there that was more hideous than we could see on TV or find in any mass circulation magazine. I refer the reader here to Douglas Kahn's essay "Body Lags" *(City Lights Review #5)*, in which, among other shocking revelations, Kahn writes that the true story

of what went on in Vietnam is buried in Vietnam vets' attics in shoeboxes: snapshots of necromutilation.

Let's say Dickey *is* exulting over enemy destruction—is it fair to generalize, as Duncan appears to have done, that such reveals "hostile cravings for destructive power?" Should Dickey have kept his mouth shut about what turned him on and written poems (as did many American poets involved in WW II) that pretended that no violation of the human had occurred?

Poetry is still regarded by many as a sacred cow domain, or Sunday museum, in which X may be exposed but only under certain conditions and in certain ways. Is American poetry then still prisoner of a genteel English tradition that Owens and Lawrence, for example, tried to abolish? Or is there something paddling about in the Puritan depths of the American poet that says: hold off in really saying it as you imagine it to be. From such a perspective, Whitman's guarded openness seems heroic. Are we not called upon today to go at least as far from what is conventionally acceptable as Whitman went from Victorian dissimulation?

No one I know or have read has implied that Mark Danner's book-length expose of the El Mozote massacre in Salvador revealed anything ugly about Danner. Is this because, in Danner's case, we credit him with an objectivity that, when psyche comes into play, we refuse?

Alas, news reports are as unstable in their own way as psyche is in hers. One can argue that when psyche comes into play, a significant additional aspect of the human becomes involved. Secretly, we know that all are monstrous in psyche. Psyche is an inverse panopticon: as she reveals self, there is no place, in Rilke's words, "that does not see you." Also keep in mind that all so-called "objective reports" come via the bodies and minds of human beings. The media filter system (much more complicated than book publishing) is a political mine field of priorities and agendas. How do we know who is telling the truth? Poetry is interesting in this regard, for *because of* its excessive subjectivity the truth of a given matter can often be detected.

The last focused period for political poetry in America was the late 1960s. While significant political poetry has been written over the past twenty-five years (Baraka, Rothenberg, Rich, Grahn, Duncan, and Cortez immediately come to mind), it has been an isolated response in contrast to the coalescing of collective conscience in the late 1960s. The 1960s were, politically-speaking in the arts, a burgeoning; the seeds and early growths are in the late 1940s and the otherwise flatfooted 1950s. Does it take a prolonged war (with significant American loss) to give heft to a politically-effective art? Aesthetically-speaking, over the past twenty-five years, poetic energy has undergone the division between writing workshop displays of

self-sensitivity and an inventive yet non-referential Language Poetry that declares itself political but refuses to work with event in the poem itself.

In a recent interview with Michael Palmer *(Exact Change Yearbook 1995)*, Peter Gizzi mentions that he understands Palmer's "The Circular Gates" (1974) "as a poem constructed out of the Vietnamese War." Palmer agrees, so I went back to the poem. While such phrases as "Some talk of war" and "Sometimes we are at war" occur here and there in this fifteen page poem, Vietnam is not mentioned, nor are there any images or references in the poem that would link it to a concern with the Vietnamese War. Palmer's commentary following Gizzi's description of "The Circular Gates" is interesting and worth our attention:

> It was very much so; I was looking for a means of representation that I could feel honest with. In other words, I think one of the problems of an overtly political poetry now is something that Octavio Paz has brought up, that so much of it has to do with newspaper reports and so little of it has to do with witness. We look at the powerful poems of witness of this century and they are not about newspaper reports, and they're not about proposing one's particular *point de repère*, point of view, position, so much as facing something that may even overwhelm the poetic sign in its multiplicity of meanings, something often horrible. The American tendency is to read our politics out of these distant events and then to write some almost self-congratulatory oppositional work. And so what I tried to face (speaking of "Seven Poems within a Matrix of War" now) was, what did we experience of that thing—which was the overwhelming flood of images, the controlled imagery that was poured over us, whether that be the exploding suns over Baghdad on the CNN nightly news, or. . .

It would be interesting to have the full Paz statement, for in Palmer's comments its significance is hard to grasp. Since Paz has become increasingly conservative as he has aged, the chances are that the "something" Palmer is recalling is not in support of abrasive political poetry.

Palmer's distinction between witness and newspaper report (à la Paz) seems unrealistic to me. Significant poems solely based on direct witness, such as Radnoti's or Owens', are more rare than one might think. Vallejo relied mainly on newspaper and radio reports, or word of mouth, even though he was in Spain at the time (1937) and did visit the Madrid front, to write *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*. Neruda's huge *Canto general* is a mix of witnessing and historical research. Celan's poetry, the fruit of the

death camps, is an utter entanglement of witnessing, memory, hermeticism, literary reference, and attack on the German language. As Jed Rasula has perceptively noted: "With Celan, the German language itself becomes the means of its own disembodiment. In his hands, more and more of the language simply goes up in smoke. . .A prick from a rose killed Rilke. Celan writes as if an entire crown of roses were being held in place in his mouth. Beauty is bloody."

I wonder where Palmer would place Duncan's "Up Rising." Since Duncan never visited Vietnam, the poem is not one of direct witnessing. Yet as Duncan has written: "Riding the wave at once of my own high blood pressure—a physical disorder I was ignorant of at the time but to which the poem refers clearly—and of my outrage in the 'high blood pressure' attack of the American government on Vietnam. . .I saw Johnson as the demotic leader, unleashing into action and moved by the secret evil of American karma as Hitler or Stalin had impersonated the evil karma of Germany or Russia." Thus the "Up Rising" of the poem's title is, again in Duncan's words, "multiphasic." It draws on the whole man, and could qualify as one of "the powerful poems of witness of this century."

Palmer proposes that when an unwitnessed political event is engaged directly in a poem the result may be "self-congratulatory oppositional work." Here the problem of self-projection raised by Duncan reading Levertov takes on a new twist: the media blizzard that Palmer later in the interview calls "hallucinatory" produces a poem that is deflected from the political into a space possessed by the non-sequitor information storm of truth and lies. It is as if a new purgatory, a postmodernist DMZ, has insinuated itself between the poet and some event out there. This purgatory is multifaceted: while it is packed with cul-de-sacs, it is also permeated with global information on a scale undreamed of before the Vietnamese War. W.H. Auden, in his essay "The Poet and the City" (1962), a bit dated but still sharp and unnerving, discussed the increasing difficulty in poets using public figures as themes for poetry "because the good or evil they do depends less upon their characters and intentions than upon the quantity of impersonal force at their disposal."

In the so-called "Gulf War" (Chomsky referred to it as a "form of international terrorism"), "impersonal force" was presented as a video game, intercut with information-screened press conferences. It was awful, as awful in its own way as the "war," but somehow many of us figured out what *was* going on, and six months later, via books and magazine articles, I, for one, felt I had enough solid information on which to make a response, goaded by the fact that I was originally, in the months before our invasion, taken in by the media hype of Iraq's awesome military power.

Both Palmer and I look out workroom windows and see healthy trees and hear chirping birds. As white middle-class males, our immediate

environment is almost always at odds with much of what pierces it via the information storm. As Americans, especially as white ones, we have permission to say anything in print that we want to say (with the recent qualification that what we say may be ignored because we are white American males). Our lives and the lives of our families will not be imperiled by anything we declare. We are thus permitted to live in a kind of cocoon through which odorless information zips, a significant amount of which implicates, and mortifies us, as citizens. We do not depend on newspaper reports: we "witness" via TV, as witnesses twice-removed. Unlike Aimé Césaire, say, we do not have the opportunity to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves or write. We primarily speak for, and to, ourselves.

At the same time, no one is shooting at us—yet. Like at least some of our admired predecessors, we are able to daily engage the ancient adventure of not only attempting to "know ourselves" but of working on and contesting a self in poetry. These opportunities must not go unacknowledged. In comparison to writers in such diverse places as China, Algeria, and Yugoslavia, we are left alone, financially sufficient, and our books somehow get published. However—and here I must speak solely for myself—I feel an absolute obligation to pull some of the invaded outside I am implicated in through the information purgatory and push it to the fore in my poetry. I really do not care if it offends people even to the extent of leading them to dismiss all that I have done.

*

Paz's preference for a political poetry of direct witness, taken up by Palmer, is sounded throughout what may be the largest gathering of such poetry ever assembled into a single volume: Carolyn Fouché's *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*, an 800 page anthology with 145 poets. Forché believes that for significant political poetry to occur, the poet must have directly experienced one or more of the following conditions: "exile, state censorship, political persecution, house arrest, torture, imprisonment, military occupation, warfare, and assassination." At the same time, she states that political poetry may involve the "personal" (which she inadequately defines as "lyrics of love and emotional loss") and does *not* have to address the "extreme conditions" she has insisted the political poet must have experienced. She adds that she "was interested in what these poets wrote, regardless of the explicit content."

One implication of these somewhat confusing statements is that poems which would not strike one as political would qualify for inclusion as long as they had been written by someone who had been exiled, say, or had spent time in the army. In contrast, a powerful political poem written by

someone who had not met at least one of Forché's personal experience criteria would not be, in effect, significantly political. I also wonder about "assassination." According to Forché, were a poet to be assassinated, his prior poetry would qualify as being political.

At the beginning of each poet's section, Forché offers a brief biographical note that identifies the "experience of extremity" justifying the poet's inclusion. On the basis of these notes I came up with the following figures:

45 of the poets had a "military occupation," which often involved "warfare" (and, I presume, killing).

48 of the poets were "imprisoned," or "under house arrest," sometimes "tortured," and in 6 cases "assassinated."

14 of the poets were either briefly, or for an extended period of time, in "exile." Some of those exiled (St. John Perse is a good example) were self-exiled, lived well in exile, and continued to remain in their country of exile after they could have safely returned home.

This leaves us with 38 poets, some of whom appear to have experienced "state censorship" or "political persecution." The latter category is so broad as to nearly be irrelevant e.g., in America, nearly every minority writer would fall into this category. Thus Ray A. Young Bear is identified as simply having lived in the Mesquakie Tribal Settlement, having taught at several universities, and as being a singer and the co-founder of a dance troupe. In other cases, the "political persecution" does not strike me, on the basis of the information given, as being "extreme." Wislawa Szymborska's first book "was deemed incomprehensible and overly morbid by the Communist government." Nicanor Parra "refused to leave Chile after the coup that brought Pinochet to power." Adonis is included on the basis of work that is "marked by a strongly nontraditional sense of social commitment." No "experience of extremity" is noted in his or several other cases.

While pondering this group of poets—which make up between one quarter and one third of the book—I realized that with very few exceptions every poet I consider to be impressive could have found his or her way into this group. Forché herself acknowledges in her Introduction that "When I began this project, I was hard pressed to find a significant poet who could not be included, who in some important way or another did *not* bear witness to the ravages of our time." Then, needing to constrict this openness to a focus that would justify those who were included, she writes: "I decided to limit the poets in the anthology to those for whom the social had been irrevocably invaded by the political in ways that were sanctioned neither by law nor by the fiction of the social contract." "the social" is a curious phrase to use here; does she mean "their lives?" Clearly, such an invasion means one thing for Otto René Castillo, a Guatemalan poet who

was incarcerated, tortured, and burned alive—and something else for Young Bear, Adonis, Parra, or for Sipho Sepamla whose biographical note, in its entirety, reads: "Born in Krugersdorf, South Africa, trained as a teacher. A prizewinning writer of fiction as well as poetry, he is director of the Federated Union of Black Arts in Johannesburg."

In other words, Forché seems to make up rules as she goes along, making many of her inclusions seem arbitrary and primarily based on her taste. Even though aspects of the contributor information indicate that a vague kind of political correctness is involved, many omitted poets could have been included on that same arbitrary basis. While reading the anthology (and without doing any research), I came up with a significant list of omissions, some of which are shocking, and some of which could have been included using Forché's criteria.

Artaud	Duncan	Perelman
Bly	Enzensberger	Rexroth
Braithwaite	Ginsberg	Reznikoff
Cardinal	Gunn	Rich
Cendrars	Grahn	Rothenberg
Césaire	N. Guillen	Sanders
Cortez	Jeffers	Snyder
Csoori	MacDiarmid	U'Tamsi
Depestre	Mac Low	Waldman
Dickey	Pasolini	CK Williams
Dorn	Paz	

Granted, everyone will have his list of omissions. However, the absence of Artaud, Césaire, Ginsberg, Pasolini, and Reznikoff is serious enough to throw the authenticity of the anthology into question.

Under one guise of restricting her inclusions to poets who directly experienced violence, generally in war, Forché has acted as if Conscientious Objection (Rexroth), Ecology (Snyder), Gay Liberation (Gunn, Rich, Grahn) or Womens' Rights (Cortez) are not significant witnessing. Given her emphasis on "extreme conditions" (the word "extreme" is the key word in her Introduction), how is it that Artaud, aptly defined by Susan Sontag as "one of the great daring mapmakers of consciousness *in extremis,*" is not included?

The answer to such a question has several facets. Forché's section divisions, from *The Armenian Genocide* to the final *Revolutions and the Struggle for Democracy in China*, are all based on wars. All of the included poets must fit into one of these war sections. This means that parts of the world not covered in one of the fifteen war sections are not represented

at all. There are no Caribbean, Irish, Scandinavian, Australian, Canadian, Scottish, Central African, or Algerian poets.

Thus if an individual's writing does not connect with a war-oriented section, he or she, from the book's viewpoint, is simply not a significant witness and is outside the so-called "experience of extremity." Alienation, addiction, madness, and subsequent incarceration (the Artaud trajectory) have no slot. Artaud's imprisonment (which spanned the Second World War, involved near-starvation and 51 electroshock sessions), unlike Jimmy Santiago Baca's ("arrested for drug possession with intent to sell"), is not valid.

James Fenton, an Englishman who worked as a reporter in Vietnam and Cambodia, is included. He fits into the *War in Korea and Vietnam* section. Ed Dorn, who wrote a long reportage on the Shoshonean Indians, is not included. Had Dorn been conscripted into the US Army (or following the Santiago Baca example, had he been arrested for drug dealing), he would, according to the book's peculiar logic, have qualified. However, he also might not have: Santiago Baca was not only arrested on drug charges but he is an Indian. Arrest coupled with ethnicity gave him entree.

Forché *has* included a number of quite significant poets that few of us would dispute. Some of these poets, however, are very curiously represented. A few examples:

Vallejo's two and a half pages consist of two poems from his first book (1918), written a decade before he developed a political consciousness in his writing, and one minor piece from his years in Europe. Given what Vallejo could have been represented by—most obviously, his Spanish Civil War poems— the Vallejo section is dumbfoundingly weak.

Parra is presented as anthology-valid because he refused to leave Chile after the coup that brought Pinochet to power (1974). Yet all the included Parra poems were written before 1972, or before, in the book's terms, he had made a significant political commitment.

In Lorca's case, the "assassination" oddity I mentioned earlier comes up. He is mainly represented by poems he wrote in New York City in the late 1920s. Does his political execution make these poems political? Well, they are—but not because he was executed. Allen Ginsberg's poems on New York City are not included, in spite of the fact that *Howl* was banned, that he was thrown out of Cuba and Czechoslovakia for political reasons, and currently his poetry cannot be broadcast in this country between 6 AM and 8 PM. I'd call these matters "State Persecution."

The fact that Galway Kinnell "actively protested the war in Vietnam" (as did several hundred other poets) is used to explain the inclusion of his poem "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond" in which there are several references to "Asia." However, Duncan, Sanders, Bly, Mac Low, and

Rothenberg, who also actively protested our invasion of Vietnam, are not included.

One might also inquire why none of Denise Levertov's poems on the Vietnamese War (in particular, "Life at War") were included. They are much more powerful than the pieces she wrote during her 1972 visit to Vietnam (three of which are).

Amiri Baraka's entire section consists of poems he wrote before 1965, when he was Leroi Jones and, relative to the past three decades, politically inactive.

Quasimodo is permitted to write about Auschwitz, which he never directly experienced, while Reznikoff's *Holocaust*, one of the few major American responses to the Holocaust in poetry, and one which consists entirely of testimony from the Nuremberg trials, goes unrepresented (as does Rothenberg's "Khurbn," a long poem based on the poet's visit to the remains of the death camps in the 1980s).

I mentioned earlier that Vallejo received two and a half pages in the anthology. Celan and Radnoti, the most commented-on poets in the Introduction, receive three and four and a half pages respectively. Yet a versified "war" short story by Louis Simpson is offered twenty-six pages. Given the dense complexity of virtually all of Celan's poetry from the late '50s on (all of which is, on one level, saturated with the Holocaust), I began to notice the extent to which Forché's own rather conventional writing played a role in her selections. With the exception of Oppen, Levertov, and Leroi Jones, there are no American poets in the anthology associated with the various experimental fronts over the past fifty years. However, poets who would have been or were quite at home in the old *New Poets of England and America* anthology abound: Kunitz, Hugo, Simpson, Nemerov, Hecht, Dugan, Kinnell, Lowell, with Auden, Spender, and MacNiece a bit before them, and Fenton and Balaban a bit after.

Of course Forché is entitled to represent her view of significant poetry in any anthology she edits. But since this is not a general anthology but one in which there is a requirement for a careful assessment of what constitutes the most memorable poetry of witness in conditions of extremity, I believe that one's own poetics, taste, and companions in poetry must be made to yield to the project's obligations, to the field it proposes to engage. Say Forché simply does not care for Thom Gunn's poetry and would not include him in her version of a generalist 20th century anthology. That is fair enough. But: is it possible in the 1990s to edit an anthology of political witnessing and not include anything on AIDS? Or for that matter, on the humiliating political conditions gay men and women have experienced, everywhere, throughout the 20th century? And if it were simply a matter of page count, then, for example, I would feel obligated to leave Gertrude Stein out and put Gunn in. Stein is a major figure in many respects, but the

fact that she lived in the occupied French countryside during the Second World War would not justify including poems by her that have little to do with witnessing in any trenchant sense. I would also have left out passages from Perse's poem, *Exile*, since it could have been written in the 19th century.

Uncomfortable with what she takes to be a gap between the personal and the political, Forché attempts to bridge the two terms by suggesting that the space between them can be described as "the social," and that it is in "this social space" that we should situate poetry. An alternative to setting up a duality to be bridged is to see the personal and the political not as separate categories but as aspects of a singular, composite force that makes up poetic identity. Any poetic utterance is personal/political. When one thinks one is being apolitical, the chances are one is in agreement with the way things are, which is also a political stance. Any political poem is helplessly infused with one's own personality, one's language, one's feeling for oneself in a context that involves others.

Forché's editorial policy is less involved with bridging the personal and the political than with assuming that the personal must be directly invaded by the political for any significant witnessing to take place. How much terror must I experience to justify my speaking for someone who is in agony or who has died from torture?

The exile, in this respect, may be in less of a position to bear significant witness than someone who lived next door to a "disappeared," watched the person be stuffed into a car trunk, and who daily spoke to the "disappeared's" despairing wife or husband. In "Vocabulary," Ariel Dorfman writes: "But how can I tell their story/if I was not there?" He concludes: "Let them speak for themselves." Forché quotes these lines and understands them to mean that "the story belongs to those who have undergone the extremity."

Dorfman's last line evokes the paradox that while I can only speak for myself, I must also speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Thus Aimé Césaire's monumental "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," in which he speaks for himself, as a black Martinican exorcising his colonial poisoning, *and* for his fellow Martinicans, some of whom are dead and some of whom, being illiterate and uninformed, do not know how to speak for themselves. The amount of direct experience needed for imagined witnessing varies for every individual. It is a mistake to prioritize experience over imagination.

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What I referred to as the new purgatory, or postmodernist DMZ, makes witnessing more and more complicated, at least when measured by the old

standard of being there versus hearing about it. This DMZ is not simply a neutralizing zone between person and event but the technological spectacle that surrounds us and intersects human relationships. Once upon a time, a spectacle was a public execution, or a sideshow, something one went to, and returned from, back into one's private sphere. The spectacle has now not only invaded the private sphere, but conquers it on a daily and nightly basis.

What we see through media is the world as spectacle run by a kind of Image Exchange, as if modeled upon the Stock Exchange, in which information is so intertwined with commodities that they are often indistinguishable. In myth, images were specific; they were not separated from what they revealed. In technology, commercial considerations have turned images into refugees; they can be relocated whenever and wherever it is convenient.

The challenge facing imagination today, at least in America and much of Western Europe, is that all things have come into their caricatures. Such requires the act of witnessing to come to terms with the fact that it too is part of the spectacle. In June, 1994, millions of Americans stared for hours at the image of a white bronco pursued by a flotilla of police cars. The formation's steadiness—no careening chases, no pile-ups—made the cars appear static and the wide freeway, as in a reverie, moving. The spectacle reminded one of a packed football stadium during pre-game ceremonies: the police cars moved as a rectangular-shaped marching band. The bronco played the role of the drum major, the head of the band. In this case, of course, the bronco leading the show contained, we are told, a man with a gun to his temple and his mother on the phone. Alongside the freeway and the center divider, hysterical cheerleaders, fans raised OJ signs up and down.

For the past six months, millions, now following the game itself, have witnessed witnesses testifying for or against a celebrity which the camera angle generally presents as a bust. The trial is a caricature of a trial, a larger than life football opera, a thing we can and cannot grasp. What *are* we witnessing? A trial? A travesty of justice? The greatest show on earth? A long and boring proof of what we already know, that we can never know the absolute truth? That we are all seeing something slightly different and may have a closer view than someone who is actually there, sitting at the back of the courtroom? That we see more of what is going on than—is it possible—Simpson himself? What he mainly sees are twelve people—or are they disciples? Jurors become witnesses, not of the crime but of the spectacle of the trial, trying to assemble the pieces. Like us, they will only truly be witnesses of the puzzle of their own presence.

We know that every culture develops "distancing devices" to hide the facts about its bloody past. Now with digitally-altered videos, one can

totally change history. One can even show Germans smiling and making breakfast for the inmates of Auschwitz. Digital alteration takes the spectacle into a new and absolute dimension. Paradoxically, it might also release us from the spectacle as it will not only make indirect witnessing impossible but demonstrate the ability of lies to go undetected.

—CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Report from Schumacher

At Schumacher College this year St. Valentine's Day was replaced by "Strange Attractor" Day. This remote Centre for Ecological and Spiritual Studies in South Devon, England, was for three weeks in February 1995 like a small-is-beautiful branch of the Santa Fe Institute, and was buzzing with edge of chaos theory, complexity, excitable mediums, and "strange attractors"—which Brian Goodwin, the originator of the course and its presiding spirit, defined (according to my notes) as a pattern that a complex dynamic system can settle down to when its apparently chaotic nature gives way to an order arising deterministically from its interactions. This is the famous "order for free" that computers have enabled us to discover in the last thirty years. It is essentially the role that Eros was, in classical times, thought to perform, or, later, Venus and her son before he linked up with Hallmark cards. Hesiod tells us that Eros was the third to emerge from primal Chaos after Earth and Tartaros (which two gave us Space). Then Eros enabled Uranus and Gaia to give birth to the offspring Chronos, the Time element in Space-Time. Besides this initial role, Eros came to be thought of as shaping all the things of this world in their courses: they become themselves through desire to be as they are. Planets, clouds, the sea, creatures, the far rocks of the earth, everything has found its attractor space. In our own century D.H. Lawrence asked, "Why doesn't the sea fly off the earth in its motion?" And answered his question with the word, "Love."

I was an attentive student at Schumacher; for it seemed to me the commonsense organic approach of Brian Goodwin in biology could probably provide a way into various other areas, could increase our understanding of, well, everything. Meanwhile, the main thrust there was to get Darwinism on the right track. Random genetic mutation and environmental selection is not really a convincing explanation of the origin

of species. For one thing, there's not been enough time for such randomness to produce life as we have it. It's as if, said Goodwin, a whirlwind went through a junkyard and left behind a 747. That's the odds. However, if tendencies toward basic shapes inhered in complex interactions of proteins and minerals, then it would increase the odds tremendously. And it turns out they do.

We did a hands-on experiment to see for ourselves spatial order arising spontaneously from a chemical reaction. We all had a flat glass petri dish the bottom of which we covered with a solution carefully prepared from sodium bromate, sulfuric acid, malonic acid, and sodium bromide. Rings started to form in the solution for no other reason than the interaction of these ingredients produces such rings, and spirals too. These are geometric consequences of the specificity of the system, There's another system that produces similar rings, said Goodwin: slime mold. As long as there is enough bacterial food available, these single-celled amoebae move around independently. As soon as there is a shortage (if the bog dries up) the cells, on signals from each other, form aggregated colonies of several thousand cells in concentric circles, not by intention but because the chemical interaction again delivers physical special order. The fact that these associated cells go on to form themselves into a slug-like conglomerate which moves, leaving a trail of slime, before it further changes into a stalk with a fruiting body that can resist dessication and preserve itself until it senses food is there again, all this ordering by unicellular creatures in a dynamic system just adds to the awe of it all. And yet when you examine the dynamics closely, Goodwin's view of what is going on makes most sense.

These are systems where a small variable can make a great deal of difference. For example, ants below a certain density of population move around chaotically. At a critical point, one additional ant can bring about a sudden ordering in the multitude so that aims in terms of reproduction and collective survival are furthered. It is the chemistry of the right number of ants bumping into each other that does it. Overpopulation brings chaos again, and a rectification. The best thing is to be on the edge of chaos.

Goodwin's own research using a computer model of calcium concentrations in certain unicellular plant-like algae brought him to the belief that the whorls found widespread in nature are simply a product of the inherent patterning of calcium in cellulose given certain initial conditions. From a computer keyed to represent growth, he obtained one of these strange-attractor, order-for-free modes that happen when you let your machine run all night. His hypothesis is that the basic ordering in the world, and thus the origin of species, is from patterns that natural materials fall into inevitably. If I haven't got this exactly in the right words, Goodwin's own phrasing of it can be consulted in technical articles in the *Journal of*

Theoretical Biology, and recently in his very readable *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots* (published in both the UK and the US in 1994). I managed to get the modest Prof. Goodwin to admit that this book might be the first full statement to the general public of the alternative to strict genetic Darwinism: evolution by organic forms. (Previously the most successful popular account of these matters has been Roger Lewin's *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* in Collier Books 1992.)

Extrapolating, it seems to me the brain must have such attractors to preserve images of the shapes of things in the mind. It's inconceivable that the brain has to re-recognize things from scratch every instant. More then that, the Jungian archetypes can be understood as where the mind has found resting places within chaos from time immemorial. And every act of creativity in the arts, perhaps, moves from one attractor to another, order emerging in continually new ways but limited by what is initial in us all, and therefore susceptible to recognition by others with the same sort of brains.

The Santa Fe's Stuart Kauffman, in the UK for a talk before the Linnaean Society, came down to Devon for a day to see what Brian Goodwin was doing. He talked to us for four hours, taking us through his book *The Origins of Order: Self-Organization and Selection in Evolution* (Oxford 1993), and every moment we felt we understood exactly what he was saying in that moment, complicated though it was. *Nature* reviewing his book "slapped it"—so we still have a long way to go, he said. But there can be no gainsaying the new methodology that has become available through computers. The new telescope," he called Turing's machine, "by which we can see emergent behavior systems, collective phenomena we couldn't see before. . .There are new observables in the world."

And "strange attractors" are not really strange. That's just an adjective taken over from mathematics. Quite the opposite, in fact. They are what keep things familiar, Hence the title of the new Kauffman book coming from Oxford later this year: *At Home in the Universe.* I didn't have the chance to tell Kauffman that he had chosen exactly the title that I think Charles Olson would have used in order to write about the possibilities of the post-modern, had he lived to develop the concept. The first to use the term "post-modern," Olson stated, in a letter to Robert Creeley of 20 August 1951, that in contrast to the modern, who is alienated from the universe, "any POST-MODERN is born with the ancient confidence that he *does* belong." He believed, reversing Heraclitus, that we don't now have to be estranged from that which is most familiar.

This sets the ground for a new Valentine's Day. And in this connection Brian Goodwin points out that the human heart is itself an "excitable medium," as defined by complexity theory. Heartbeats are the result of a dynamic field working in the pattern of an attractor. The normal heartbeat

has irregularities—the wobbling is its saving grace, for a too ordered system doesn't respond too well to infarcts. Metronomic ambitions are the beginning of disaster. The abnormally fast heartbeat called fibrillation is regular in its repetitions; it is a spiraling attractor which leads within minutes to that fatal attractor where there is no heartbeat at all. Us post-moderns might find a moral here. The heart tells us not to seek perfection, to beware an attractor that doesn't let one respond to variables and the diversity of life. The brinkmanship of the Cold War worked, though we didn't know why. The media promulgated the image of implacable enemies, but in truth it was life at the edge of chaos, which we now understand provides maximum opportunity for response to change and an unexpected fullness of life. In affairs of the heart too this will be the case: shun rigidity as a recipe for security, welcome vagaries, know that order emerges from chaos eventually in its own sweet way.

—RALPH MAUD

Drew Milne, *Sheef Mettle* (London: Alfred David Editions, 1994)

Collected here are five short, dense, ambitious sequences by the young Scottish poet and editor of the journal of poetry and poetics *Parataxis: modernism and modern writing*. This poetry is a test of mettle.

> Go litel bok, invoice these strain line shadow inks,
> or suffer in silence image mephitis,
> I can smell your poison squirt of ingrained chalice

The opening stanza of "Satyrs and Mephitic Angels" indicates what to expect: a verse acutely, even painfully conscious of it own precarious conditions of possibilities, with ever an eye on invoicing the costs of giving voice to the transubstantiating hopes for communion. It is perhaps symptomatic of the present position of poetry that Milne feels compelled to begin rather than conclude his volume with an envoi that's become an invoice. As the etymological pun in the above mentioned title suggests, satire is an inescapable mode throughout such politically attentive work, sardonically surveying the mephitic state of contemporary society that

conditions the poems' own prospects. While clearly it is J.H. Prynne to whom this work is most immediately indebted, there is much that might remind us of Zukofsky, say "A'-9" with its agonized effort to sing out of and beyond its commodified state:

> A dangerous demagogic word holds us surely,
> like the masses the measure *is* suffer; for these
> abolitionist crudités, as raw mangetout,
>
> may smash up *(piano)* while your smudge spill barks out
> *beyond* purely verstehenden explication,
> in these hand sewn diagnostics of future past.

The critical vantage that enables the distance from conditions as they are is itself rendered possible by them, so rationalizing critique threatens to close down what it opens up. Here critique-satire is folded into the misdirectional language of the poetic moving toward song. This tends to make for a bifocal reading: a slower, halting concentration on a self-disrupting analytical and argumentative development, and a more rapid movement with the wit and sound of the word-surface. The splitting of these readings is itself a mark of present antinomies, and the hope of their convergence the utopian promise *"beyond* purely verstehenden explication." What happens when you cross Stevens and Habermas, as in "The Idea of Order at Habermas-Platz," which concludes:

> so alphabet *ratio* in D.I.Y. Church
> dawns on fishers of networks puritanical,
> all undistorted or wish-sweet as bliss revenge;
>
> sound bite angel, go wholly public spherical.

Well, evidently, this is less than a solution as the sweet temptation of undistorted communication appears to be ironically deflated.

Despite or because of the skepticism with which this poetry eyes its own aspirations, the verbal wit and prosodic invention is impressively accomplished and enlivening. "Positive Indiscriminations" exuberantly puts the "male my hermit manner view" through the ringer:

> I'll be buggered doubt if it ill be easier
> to trekky from cling-on to boldly woe, wrecky
> from hornblower, as my toy captain flies undone
> to the oh so moby dick.

In a more somber register is the cycle of nine unrhymed sonnets, "A Garden of Tears," which takes its epigraph from the feisty concrete artist, poet and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay: "Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks." Finlay's garden at Little Sparta (Stonypath) enacts ("a garden is a process") a political commentary on society—an instigation for the radical transformation of that society. What about the revolutionary implications of the love sonnet? Milne's garden considers the intimacies of love conditioned by the violences of our world: "It's a long way still where love our gulf is war." The promise of the garden-poems acerbates the sense of loss and exile that pervades this sequence, which might in turn goad us to stumble toward love's promise: "the labors of our loss are still glistening, / and where the going is over, gone over, / there we go, slightly pale, to the ends of love."

In these sequences the hopes ingrained in song are tested by a rigorous skepticism so that such tempering might carry us forward:

> This world awaits a glaze of angel pens,
> but I renounce weapons of happiness
> and the petals of blood which kiss such hope-
> less greener grassless: "Shoot into the foot,
> I say, and only then into the air."
>
> ("A still life in blue")

—JEFF TWITCHELL

Torture By Light: Architectural Anguish

> In fact, walls and pages are perfectly similar,
>
> —Thomas Bernhard

The space of thought and writing leaves room for reflection. The amphibology inherent in the preceding sentence is intentional: not only is writing always somehow rooted in a certain sense of place, but furthermore, the very subject of the private space of writing is a theoretically neglected domain. Paradigms of architecture, design and style should be of central interest to considerations of literary production: the wood-

paneled Victorian library can hardly inspire the same thoughts as the ascetic emptiness characteristic of a certain type of New York Soho loft. *Were I to reveal, for example, that I can only write in my own library, surrounded by a very idiosyncratic selection of books, and that in moments of reflection—or indeed of sheer exasperation, or emptiness—my gaze is most often caught by the morbid, otherworldly light of Redon's engraving, "Le passage d'une âme," something might be gleaned about the conclusions at which I arrive, or at the very least about the content of certain footnotes. Yet what I have just offered of my private space is hardly a description, but rather an abstraction used as an allegory, where one might well sense the inherent paradoxes of a mise-en-abîme, within which one modality of space opens up to, or is subsumed by, another.* There would seem to be a hermeneutic primacy of the ascetic space of empty rooms.

On the question of architectural space, the real and the ideal are often inseparable. In Thomas Bernhard's novel *Correction*, the plot is articulated by the conceptual and existential relations between two antithetical architectural sites involving the protagonist, Roithamer, who is based on Ludwig Wittgenstein. Roithamer found the ideal circumstances for reflection within the simplicity of the garret of his friend Hoeller's house, located amidst the deafening roar of the waters of the Aurach gorge. It is here that he conceives of the contrasting complexity of the "habitation Cone" which he designed as the dwelling for his sister, conceived to be in perfect spiritual harmony with her. Built in the exact center of the Kobernausser forest, its three floors contained seventeen rooms, with the peak of the Cone housing a windowless meditation room (intended for Roithamer alone) containing nothing but a water faucet (in minimal and ironic symbolic doubling of the aquatic sonority of Hoeller's garret.) As the Cone was to be properly experienced from top to bottom, Roithamer's sister was obliged to enter the house blindfolded the first time she arrived; she soon left it dead, eyes closed, the Cone transformed into her cenotaph. At that point, according to the wishes of Roithamer, "the Cone is to be left to decay, never again to be touched by anyone, and is to be abandoned entirely to nature."[1] In the lineage of Ledoux and Boullée, rarely has rationalized utopian architecture conceived a more perfect project; and rarely has literature produced a more disquieting architectural allegory.

In 1914, Ludwig Wittgenstein—whose major aesthetic claim was that "ethics and aesthetics are one"—built himself a house, near a remote lake, accessible only by boat. Intended as a site for solitary meditation, this structure was much less conventional and far more complicated than the simple hut that myth would have it be: trapezoidal in form, its 24 x 27 foot surface was covered by a triangular balconied roof. This small dwelling existed in distinct contradistinction to the famed 11,000 square feet residence in Vienna—built in 1926-27, and now a landmark of modernist

architecture—that he designed for his sister, Margarethe Stonborough-Witgenstein. This house was inspired by Wittgenstein's friend Adolf Loos, but its form and details were refined and purified according to Wittgenstein's own ethical-aesthetic principles, following a perfectionism equal to that of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. For example, it is told that just before the completion of the house, he had the ceiling of one of the huge rooms raised a mere 3 centimeters, in order to perfect the proportions. The house was characterized by one of Wittgenstein's other sisters, Hermine, in the following terms: "It seemed indeed to be much more a dwelling for the gods than for a small mortal like me, and at first I even had to overcome a faint inner opposition to this 'house turned logic' as I called it, to this perfection and monumentality."[2] As much as she admired this masterpiece, she admitted that she could not have lived in it—a quite common, indeed stereotypical, reaction to rationalized modernist architecture. *Having myself resided in two of Le Corbusier's structures in Paris—the Swiss Pavilion and the Brazilian Pavilion at the Cité Universitaire— I can attest to these constrictions, and have often made the same claim.*

Wittgenstein wrote that, "Working in philosophy—like work in architecture in many respects—is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of oneself.)"[3] This confluence of aesthetics, ethics and psychology might well suggest that architecture must necessarily combine the gestural and the conceptual, the affective and the geometric, the site-specific and the universal, poesis and mathesis. Most of all, it implies that architecture should be read as either a symbolic form or a life form, congruous with the values of the architect. Yet, if this is indeed the case, what can we make of the fact that the lighting of Wittgenstein's house consisted strictly and uniquely of bare bulbs, disposed either centrally or symmetrically on the ceiling, making it nearly impossible to read!? Might this be an allegory for the radical dissociation between philosophy and aesthetics upon which Wittgenstein always insisted? *I might add, in ironic counterpoint, that the first photograph I saw of the interior of Wittgenstein's house, constituting a nearly abstract rendition, was in a classic Soho loft, itself bare and white—except for housing one of the largest private libraries I have ever seen!*

Perhaps the answer to this architectural conundrum must be sought outside Wittgenstein's own architectural projects, found in the realizations of others, which might serve, in oblique retrospect, as concrete commentaries. The recent Bruce Nauman retrospective juxtaposed two architectural works that are emblematic of Nauman's entire oeuvre tone (which has been consciously inspired by Wittgenstein's philosophy, as was much of the conceptual art of the 1960s): *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of his Room* (1968; an empty room with two speakers that endlessly repeat variously distorted versions of the title's two injunctions), and *Yellow Room* (1973; a

small, ceilingless room in the form of an equilateral triangle painted bright yellow, lit by three yellow overhead fluorescent lights).[4] These are both anxiety-producing apparatuses which test the limits of both spectatorial attention and aesthetic form. It is difficult to say whether they trace the limits of aesthetic participation, or whether they transgress, rupture or suppress our psychic thresholds of attention, perception and cognition,

The *Yellow Room* affords all the morbid fascination of an architectural monster, attracting us by the primacy of its structure, and the elegance of its implied aesthetic proposition, all the while repelling us by the sheer force of its psychological disruptiveness. And, for once, I mean *force* in the full transitivity of its literal sense: to do violence, to compel, to hasten, to constrain, to heighten to the utmost. To remain in this room is extremely difficult: not only can't one read here, but thought itself becomes nearly impossible, given the mounting anguish. Many of those who enter immediately begin to experiment with strategies to attenuate the rising tension and anguish: one dancer/choreographer told me that she managed to remain only by laying down on the floor; some close their eyes; others nervously move about, much more quickly than the small and sometimes crowded space warrants; I found that squeezing into a corner—a primal response in the face of fear—helped somewhat; but most people simply leave. *Yellow Room* silently achieves what the vocal imperative of *Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of his Room* so noisily instructs us to do: it repels the visitor. *This is a work that perhaps demands a statistically oriented interpretation, for in a structural sense it is curiously empty, contentless, blank. Upon leaving after my third or fourth visit, I thought of an alternate model that might serve to understand the force of the* Yellow Room: *a work that would consist of photographing the faces of all those who left the room, images that, I suspect, would variously reveal anguish, perplexity, or boredom. Such would be a visceral visitors' book. Such is a theater of counter-memory.*

—ALLEN S. WEISS

Notes

1. Thomas Bernhard, *Correction*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York, Vintage, 1983), p. 14. On Thomas Bernhard's evocations of Wittgenstein, see Chantal Thomas, *Thomas Bernhard* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1990), pp. 145-161.
2. Cited in David Olson Pook, "Working on Oneself: Wittgenstein's Architecture, Ethics and Aesthetics," in *Symploke*, Volume 2, Number 1, 1994; p. 52.
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 16.
4. The Bruce Nauman exhibition was organized by the Walker Art Center in association with the Hirshhorn Museum, and recently traveled to the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the catalogue was edited by Neal Benezra, Kathy Halbreich, and Joan Simon (Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1994).

Afterimages: Revolution of the (Visible) Word

In 1965, Ian Hamilton Finlay wrote to Ernst Jandl, "I am not considered to be a poet here. . .mostly, Scotch poets. . .like to think they are *thinkers*, full of very *serious* thoughts about *serious* matters. . .but 'thought' is not *intelligence*, and one image against another, can create something more subtle than thought." And he added, "almost any Scottish poem of the present is offered to one as a comment on life, an aid, an extension, etc. . . .Hence we get inane critical remarks like: 'X has something to say' (which actually means, X's poems are crammed with jargon, about politics, hunger, Scotland, his love-life, or whatever). The notion that 'something to say' is actually a *modulation of the material* scarcely enters anyone's head."[1]

The reference here is probably to Hugh MacDiarmid's notorious dismissal of Finlay's experiments in concrete poetry as having "nothing in common with what down the centuries, despite all changes, has been termed 'poetry'."[2] Extreme as this sounds, it is still very much the Establishment attitude to a poetics that takes the visual (or aural) dimension of language as seriously as its semantic one. At a recent conference on Visual Poetics sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Yale in honor of the eminent Brazilian poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos—a conference very well attended and featuring a range of poets from Jackson Mac Low to Lello Voce, to Johanna Drucker, to a young laser holograph poet named Eduardo Kac—I didn't see a single professor from the Yale English department or from its house organ the *Yale Review*, edited by the prize-winning poet J. D. McClatchy.

But there are signs that things are changing. For even as Finlay and his fellow concretists are dismissed as "not poets," we are witnessing a quiet revolution of the visible word. Small presses like *tailspin, meow, leavebooks*—all three of these from the Buffalo Graduate Program in Poetics—are turning out dozens of visual and even tactile chapbooks like Kenneth Sherwood's *TEXT squared*, Michael Basinki's *SleVep*, and C. S. Giscombe's "Two Sections from Giscome Road," not to mention the electronic transmission of texts via *RIF/T*, which now has a thousand subscribers. From Susan Howe's dramatically charged typography in *Articulations of Sound Forms in Time* (Awede 1987) and *Eikon Basilike* (1989), to Christian Bök's "fractal" poems and poetic fractals in *CRYSTALLOGRAPHY: Book I of Information Theory* (Coach House Press), to Johanna Drucker's desktop production of the computer-generated and hand-painted *Narratology* (both 1994), "one image against another" is "creat[ing] something more subtle than thought," as Ian Hamilton Finlay put it.

Meanwhile, Finlay's own particular tradition is being carried on by his son Alec's publication of Morning Star Folios. These are collaborations

between artists and poets, published since 1990 in annual series of four issues.[3] At the outset, the folios tended to keep the verbal, visual, and even musical, media distinct, as in *Heiligenstadt*, Friedericke Mayröcker's 1978 poem, illustrated by Wes Christensen's painting *An Mein Herz* (1987) and packaged with the score to Brahms's *Intermezzo*, which is the key to the poet's narrative. But soon Finlay was bringing together artists and poets who seemed naturally in sync, as in the case of Robert Creeley and Sol Le Witt (Fifth Series). A beautiful little folio juxtaposes, on its vertical front panels, a Le Witt abstract design in black and white with Creeley's poem "Echo," which begins "Find our way out / no doubts / or in / again begin." The panels then open to reveal on the recto another composition (c. 15" square) by Le Witt, a hexagonal maze that is the perfect visual "echo" of Creeley's poem, especially the stanza "Spaces wait / faced / in the dark / no waste."

The same series contains Ian Stephen's and Will Maclean's witty and charming artist's book *A Semblance of Steerage*. The only nonverbal image here is Maclean's semi-abstract cover drawing of a stylized rudder, captioned "you learn to trust the keel that's under you." But can we so trust? The eight accordion pages that follow each have three bands of text (top, middle, bottom of page). The top band is a one-line title (e.g. "RUDDER for a Mirror," "RUDDER in teak," "SEAN'S TILLER," "BEN'S RUDDER," "RUDDER to share"). The center of each page has a little free-verse poem, usually in the form of a proposition, as in

a semblance of steering
provides procedure

or:

an offcut rudder:
counterbalanced curves
for a wee keel

where "counterbalanced" describes the intricate sound structuring itself—a "semblance of steering"—of */k/* and */iy/* phonemes. The bottom band provides a kind of commentary on the other two: for example, the lineated text above is followed by a sentence in italics with justified margins: *"(this rudder, claimed by my son as it fell from another rudder under construction, has not yet found a vessel)."* But on the final page, the page has only a top and center band:

SKIN *of varnish*

where the pun on "finish" provides an apt conclusion to the book's nautical fantasy. The "diving blade" is what remains.

In Series 5/2 (April 1994), Alec Finlay gives us a remarkable collaboration between the Chilean poet Cecilia Vicuña and the Scottish Edwin Morgan called ***PALABRAR** mas / **WURDWAPPIN** schaw.* The work consists of two square (5") pamphlets, the first containing an explanatory letter Vicuña wrote to "Eck" (Alec Finlay) together with a glossary and short poetic fragments. As the glossary suggests, Morgan provides the Scottish equivalents to Vicuña's Spanish paragrams. Thus the title "PALABRARmas," an elaborate paragram on the power of the poet's words ("palabra"= "word", "labrar" = "to work", "armas"= "arms", "más"= "more"), becomes, in a sly variant of the complex original, "WURDWAPPINschaw" (word weapon-show). Or again, the frontispiece couplet, quite formal in its articulation—*"Las palabras desean hablar / y eschucharlas es la primera labor!"*—becomes the down-to-earth *"Wurds wahnt tae spik! / Lisn! thon's yer furst wurk."*

Vicuña's letter to Eck, partly written in short prose paragraphs, partly in phrasal units, separated by small cruciform designs, deserves to be cited at some length:

> In the Mayan letters Olson speaks of 'their leavings,' (what the Maya left), but in Spanish 'sus dejos' would be 'their way of speaking,' the delicate manner in which a mother speaks to her child when no one is listening, a form of being in sound.
>
> . . .
>
> And it is the double aspect of this 'leaving' that interests me, the fact that it is practical (utilitarian) and transcendent (full of other possibilities) at the same time.
>
> This is how I see our own words. Perhaps because I see Spanish from the point of view of Quechua, and vice-versa, a word for me in any language is multidimensional, and is charged with 'hidden meanings' as we can see. . . .

Vicuña's real obsession with verbal "leavings," she explains, began in London in 1974, where she was living in exile after Pinochet's military coup. "This time it was a new set of words":

ver dad
dad ver
(truth: to give sight)

And she explains:

> Edwin Morgan's translations (so close to cons te llation,
> *latir* is the beating of the heart)
> is more than a trans
> it is an installation in the language of poetry.

"More than a trans": this surely is the point. Open the second folio and you find, on facing pages, the words:

coⁿrazón herⁱchⁱt

Delete the "n" from "Con razón" ("with reason") and you have "corazón" ("heart")—an echo, perhaps, of Pascal's "The heart has its reasons," as well as a representation of the familiar opposition of heart to head. In Morgan's Scottish version, the "hert" ("heart") contains within itself that which is "right." But the isolation of "ich" "(German "I") personalizes that heart, even as "her t" points back to Vicuña. But then her paragram isolates the "co," suggesting that these poets are truly collaborators. Not a translation, as Vicuña has said, but a "constellation" or "installation" in the language of poetry.

Succeeding pairs like "pensar/paiense" (with their play on think," "sorrow,: and "weight") carry on the poetic dialogue. And Morgan has an uncanny way of letting the Scots dialect draw out the implications in the Spanish words. On the final pages, Vicuña's

permite

el dón

with its installation of "pardon" in the midst of gift-giving, finds a nice echo in Morgan's

gie
for
gie

where the "gie" ("give"), repeated twice, takes precedence over the need for forgiveness. Where Vicuña stresses the need for "perdón," Morgan's response stresses the gift itself. A gift evidently "for" the reader.

If Vicuña and Morgan are still producing a fairly pure concrete poetry, most visual writing today—I am thinking of Bruce Andrews or bp nichol, Karen Mac Cormack or Susan Howe—uses the resources of spacing and typography, phonetic spelling, rebus, and paragram so as to contest the status of language as a bearer of uncontaminated meanings and to question the one-way linear flow between poet and reader. In this sense, visual constellation (the lamination of the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic axis) can produce what Steve McCaffery has called a "carnivalization of the semantic order." A stunning example of such "language graphics," is Joan Retallack's new book *Afterrimages* (Wesleyan, 1995), whose very title ("after" + "rim" + "ages") announces the possibilities latent in the most ordinary of words.

Newton, Retallak reminds us in her frontispiece, citing a reference in the OED, "suffered for many years from an after-image of the sun caused by incautiously looking at it through a telescope." But, speaking in the voice of her phonetic alter ego "Genre Tallique," the poet revises this linear Newtonian notion: "We tend to think of afterimages as aberrations. In fact all images are after. That is the terror they hold for us." Indeed, *after*—as in Wallace Stevens's "I do not know which to prefer / The beauty of inflections / Or the beauty of innuendoes,/ the blackbird whistling / or just after," a passage which becomes, in Retallack's scheme of things, *"After* whistling or just_____"—is a basic, perhaps the basic "form of life" today, where every image, event, speech, or citation can be construed as an "afterthought" or "aftershock" of something that has always already occurred. Hence Retallack's witty example (on the same page) from the Manhattan Project physicist Victor Weisskopff, who recalls that the explosion of the first atomic bomb was accompanied by a Tchaikovsky waltz, coincidentally being broadcast by a nearby radio station.

The *Afterrimages* sequence which gives the book its title has 34 pages, no two of which look alike. Each page serves as a kind of afterimage for the other, the lamination of citations from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, from the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lilly C. Stone's *English Sports and Recreations*, or from "Genre Tallique" herself, creating a set tantalizing "language graphics." Here is page 7:

vol low on radio • in Tangier

no smoke but smell of alarm

(see a pre-Socratic on fire in the mind)

nice being out here in the sun

(or St. Augustine on time)

±o = no future tense in dreams = o±
(poetry eludes genre as well)

sage of the ectopic eye

logical series of unsolicited occasions

(see i in e

in e in

o

s w

ec

s

The poem's perspective is that of a "sage of the ectopic Eye" (line 8). Displacement—again, afterimage—is the order of the day. "Vol low on

radio": the initial chiasmus followed by a rhyme, rather like the pop song that may be on the air, might be glossed by Wittgenstein's remark, in *Culture and Value*, that "Everything we see could also be otherwise." Fire (in Tangier? in the mind?) is announced not by smoke but by an alarm, the alarm gives rise not to sound but to smell, and the tenselessness of dreams and mathematical formula is, in a "logical series of unsolicited occasions," compared (in a tiny afterthought) to the genrelessness of poetry. And now, unsolicitated, the lines just preferred are written through (in the manner of Cage, one of Retallack's chief mentors, by means of chance operations) to yield phonemic and morphemic after-echoes. The vowels *e, i,* and *o* are extracted from the displaced or "ectopic" eye in a spatial layout that makes seeing difficult. Then the "ec" is extracted as well, "topic" (not named) taking us back to the "topic" of pre-Socratics and Augustine above. But finally there is only the "s" of "occasions," and that "s" also attaches itself to "ec" in the preceding line to give us an X. "Unsolicited occasions," it seems, produce the most interesting new poetic formations.

Page 21, by contrast, has only a tiny afterimage—"s[ ]ent" with its visual reference to "silent":

your c u p i s l e a v i n g a r i n g o n *my* t a b l e

see RHYTHM and FORM p.5

(*Enna Labraid* etc.) quoted p.4, above,

translators note on the

fabled indifference of gods

here lies[ ]entire totem of body[ ]parts

silk pilfer nasturtium semiotic *ad sequitur*

see other *Italic Poetries* p.3

α) *Hy*ge sceal *heard*ra, *heorte* be cenre;

ß) (moping virgins [*versions*] of all genders [*genres*])

.....

s[ ]ent

Here Retallack uses spacing and citation for effect: *"your* c u p i s l e a v i n g a r i g o n *my* t a b l e" comically deflates the distinction (the obsession of two-year olds) between what's *yours* and what's *mine*. For one thing, if we're seated at my table drinking, say, tea, "your" cup is not really yours

at all, because it comes from my set of dishes. Then too: "cupis" suggests "Cupid," "cupidity," "cupiscence," and so on. And cupidity is just what "you" are being accused of by the owner of the table. From here on the poem plays with mock reference, as in "RHYTHM and FORM," which might be the title of any one of a dozen handbooks on poetry, Old English saga and Latin verse, the language always running away from its source as in *"ad sequitur"* instead of non-sequitur, and the "moping virgins"—or are they "versions"—of gendres/genres. There is always space for revision: the word "virgins," etymologically quite unrelated to "versions," does sound like it. Then, too, a virgin is known by someone's version of a particular woman's history. Might this virgin have aversion to sex? The message, in any case, has been "s[ ] ent."

Poetic artifice of this order will strike some readers as an acquired taste. But if so, it's an acquired taste becoming more and more pervasive: consider, for example, Peter Gizzi's *Exact Change no. 1: Yearbook 1995*, a volume that weighs in at 414 glossy pages, whose elegant and extravant layout has been executed by a team of production assistants and printed in Hong Kong. *Yearbook 1* features Michael Palmer, glamorously pictured on the book's cover and represented by an excellent interview with Peter Gizzi and a twelve-page selection from his work. It includes a CD of readings by twelve poets from Palmer to Ted Berrigan[4] and is available for $35 from Exact Change, P. O. Box 1917, Boston MA 02205 (or for £19.50 from Carcanet Press in Britain)- something of a bargain when one takes into account how much interesting material is included. And the distribution (by Distributed Art Publishers) will surely help sales. I bought my copy at the Museum of Contemporary Art bookstore in LA, where it was prominently exhibited.

To both its admirers and its detractors (and there are sure to be a number of the latter), the *Exact Change Yearbook* represents a milestone in poetry publishing, its stylish format announcing, depending on your point of view, that the avant-garde has finally arrived or that, on the contrary, it has finally been commodified. Or perhaps a little bit of both. In their prefatory "Publisher's Note," Damon Krukowski and Naomi Yang (who doubles as the book's designer) write that they wanted to replace the now defunct New Directions annual by presenting "a large miscellany of avant-garde work, both contemporary and historical, chosen less to represent a particular 'school,' and more in the spirit of learning what's out there." To this end, the publishers asked Peter Gizzi "to help us find a range of contemporary work that draws on the tradition we publish in our books of Surrealist and other early twentieth-century experimentation. . . .To what came back we added work by *Exact Change* authors [Stein, Cage, de Chirico, Aragon], as well as a few other discoveries we were eager to share."

My own sense is that, on the whole, the publishers and editor have been remarkably successful. A yearbook does not, of course, have to provide "coverage" as does an anthology; it has none of the hang-ups that have confronted, say, Eliot Weinberger, Paul Hoover, or Douglas Messerli in recent years. If someone's not "in"—well, maybe he or she will be in *Exact Change #2*. But what makes this book so distinctive and exciting is that it juxtaposes avant-garde poets and artists from the U.S. (ranging chronologically from the *Imaginary Elegies* of the late Jack Spicer and Fanny Howe's presentation of extracts from John Wiener's very moving journal *707 Scott Street*, to a "Gallery" of younger largely unknown poets like Paul Beatty, Tory Dent, and Jennifer Moxley), with their counterparts abroad—specifically, in Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia—and, closer to home, the Caribbean and Canada. And as if these juxtapositions weren't enough, we can also read, say, Clark Coolidge or Susan Howe against Gertrude Stein's *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship Faded*, which is printed for the first time (as Julianna Spahr explains in an excellent headnote), together with Stein's source text, Georges Hugnet's *Enfance*, exactly in the form they were originally published in the journal *Pagany* (1930). Or again, we can read Barbara Guest's lecture "Poetry the True Fiction" against Hugo Ball's "Grand Hotel Metaphysics," the "Radio Happenings" of John Cage and Morton Feldman against Erik Satie's "Dried Embryos," Michael Palmer against Louis Aragon's "Peasant's Dream" or the "Fragments" of De Chirico.

Such collaging gives, at least me, a sense of—forgive the taboo word—transcendence. For instead of the usual anthology wars (who's in, who's out, which editor is sufficiently multicultural?) the *Exact Change Yearbook* offers the most convincing evidence I've seen to date that our own radical poetries are not some kind of local aberration, spawned by a bunch of theory-crazed, left-wing poets in New York and San Francisco, and perpetrated by *les jeunes* at Buffalo and other out-of-the way stations—poetries, so the mainstream would have it, to be ignored as thoroughly as possible by the various prize-giving foundations as well as most of the elite universities like my own. Indeed, what Gizzi's juxtapositions of U.S. and foreign portfolios suggest is that the attention to the materiality of language I spoke of above, to syntactic disjunction and visual constellation, and especially to the reconfiguration of lyric as speaking, once again, not only for the "sensitive" and "authentic" individual ("Here's what I, Mary Smith, realized yesterday, as I was weeding the garden") but for the larger cultural and philosophical moment—that all these are now characteristic of poetries produced around the globe.

Take Jeff Twitchell's portfolio of the "Original Chinese Language Group." As Twitchell explains, "Original, not in the sense of unique, but

because of their interest in the earlier meanings and associations that can be read in the Chinese written character. . . .So, too, the recuperation of the original impetus of poetry as the play in language." The "Original Poets," Twitchell explains, go beyond their predecessors, the so-called "Misty" (because branded "obscure" by the official critics) poets of the late 1970s, of whom the best known in the U.S. is Bei Dao. The 1988 "Original" Manifesto, reproduced here, comes out strongly against the localism, ethnocentrism, and nationalism that bedeviled Communist China until quite recently. The aim is to make contact with "modern Western art," and the vehicle for such contact, the manifesto declares, is the written character, which, compared to spoken language, is "less polluted and prejudged." "We do not avoid," they declare, "the phrase 'word games' which already has aroused great misunderstanding. We even like it. "Game" [yóuxi] is a word, connoting the profound, eerie spirit of art and philosophy." And the text gives way to the visual image of a large black cross which represents the intersection of "swim" [yóu]—to get in touch with reality—and "play" [xì].

Twitchell's portfolio is taken from the selection that appeared in the British journal *Parataxis* (#7, 1994), edited by the poet Drew Milne. In translation, the poems themselves—by Che Quian-Zi, Zhou Ya-Ping, Yi Cun, Huang Gan, Xian Meng, and Hong Liu (the one woman in this group)—don't quite live up to that manifesto.[5] "Word games," in the sense of, say, Joan Retallack's paragrammatic play, are less common than neo-Surrealist imagery and the casting of a sharp eye on the "direct treatment of the thing," in the Poundian imagist sense. Just as Pound's fabled "invention of China" turns out to have little to do with the classical Chinese models which were his source, so the Original Poets's version of "language poetry" is more graphic and precisionist than, say, Charles Bernstein's or Bob Perelman's. Here, for example, is Part III of Zhou Ya-Ping's "Vulgar Beauty":

> An afterbirth is unfolded, taking the shape of an umbrella.
> The ridges of an umbrella along yellow lines.
> A fetus like a coal cinder has long been reared in it,
> Lit by me, it will give off light.
> A white crane, unexpectedly covered by a black string-net
> A snake, bound with a copper wire, body
> Like a tightening spring, soft parts flashing.

We must remember that in the Chinese, as J. H. Prynne notes in an Afterword that is itself a kind of prose poem, the "iconic deployment [of the language] by stroke play and contexture makes a traffic with the eye worked by a different ground-plan." At one point, the translators planned

to include some of the Chinese text so as to show how the tactile element works, but the Originals themselves countered this idea because, as Prynne puts it, "it would suggest exoticism or extraneous willow-pattern ornament; to them, we are the exotics, with our credit-card view of the speech act."

The Russian portfolio, edited by Edward Foster and drawn from the conference called "The New Freedom," which Foster organized at the Stevens institute of Technology in April, 1994, raises similar issues. Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, even in the brilliantly austere translations of Lyn Hejinian, is, as is Alexei Parshchikov and Aleksandr Eremenko, given to hyperbole and extravagant conceit, to manic, gargantuan, highly sensuous catalogues of images rather than to the abstraction and citation we find in its U.S. counterparts. At the same time, as locutions like "false, foil-like grounds of gender" suggest, Dragomoschenko has obviously learned a lot from his translator's own brand of verbal play:

> I like to provoke the sensation of the thin, undependable, somehow false, foil-like grounds of gender, bearing within itself a sleepy illusion of the laws of gravity, as if governed by my movements in the unconfining limits of gravitations and diversions of space. And when, in a radiant eclipse at the inevitable reunion with earth, at the increasing of masses and the sweetest, strawberry creamlike terror of children, consciousness takes on the transparency of compressed time, the theory of free fall blossoms with fresh oxides on the lips, past which the wind carries us. . . .(from *Phosphor)*

But perhaps the most surprising of the portfolios—surprising, that is, to the wider audience that will hopefully read the *Yearbook*, is the British one, edited by Tom Raworth and titled "An Anglo-Irish Alternative." So used are we to the "gentility" of the contemporary British verse we read in Granta or Grand Street, that the opening of the first poem in Raworth's portfolio, Denise Riley's "Burnt"—

> And then my ears get full of someone's teeth again
> As someone's tongue
>
> as brown and flexible as a young giraffe's
> rasps all round someone else's story—

is startling in its refusal to pretty things up, to get the erotic scene that follows exactly "right." In the headnote, Raworth remarks that what unites his fourteen poets—among them, Catherine Walsh, D.S. Marriott, Iliassa Sequin, Ken Edwards, Maurice Scully, Lee Harwood, Wendy Mulford, Ulli

Freer, Anthony Mellors, and Raworth himself (Prynne being included with the entire "Bands Around the Throat" in the "Three Chapbooks" section, along with Beverly Dahlen and Susan Howe) is a "common distaste for what is still passed off as British poetry. . .the Hughes, Heaney, Harrison axis—the "New Generation" poets marketed like sportswear the terrible drabness of Larkin (whom I imagine wrote 'They tuck you up / your mum and dad' and then rode the wave of a typo)."

Here, as in Prynne's satiric demolition of the "credit-card view of the speech act," one has the sense that, after years of Drab Age verse, fun is once again part of the British poetry scene. One of the wittiest Morning Star Folio productions, for that matter, is Edwin Morgan's version of Kurt Schwitters's "Die Wut des Niesens" ("The Rage to Sneeze") called *Merzhanky.* Open a little folder and take out an ordinary paper napkin (cocktail size), and there is Schwitters's poem, with its marvelous onomatopoeic rendition of the "sneeze." And similar verbal play is found in Lee Harwood's superb rendition of Joseph Cornell's box-making in the set of fifty fragments called "Days and Nights: Accidental Sightings."

"Vortex," the bard said, "is energy!" We are, as the *Yearbook* makes abundantly clear, living in a great and varied moment for poetry. Rosmarie Waldrop's "Berlin(plus) Portfolio," for example, is absolutely startling in its presentation of East and West German poets, writing a poetry at once as not always amicably related. but writing an explosive, daring, and sardonic lyric that gives our own language poetics a purposely nasty spin, rather like putting a George Grosz cartoon on top of a Jasper Johns drawing. The "Canadian Emergency" section, edited by Steve Evans and "From the Anglophone Caribbean" (edited by Mark McMorris) deserve reviews of their own: the relations of McMorris's poets to a Francophone Caribbean poet like Aimé Césaire, for example (or, for that matter, to the U.S. poet Clayton Eshleman) deserve to be studied. But space forbids me to do so here, even as I can't dwell on Cole Swensen's (misspelled Swenson here—one of a number of spelling errors in this otherwise beautifully produced book) "Ecriture française," a fine selection from the work, somewhat better known to U.S. readers than the other poetries discussed here, of Anne-Marie Albiach, Emmanuel Hocquard, Claude Royet-Journoud, Dominique Fourcade, and a number of others—poets closely associated with Michael Palmer and Michael Davidson, Marjorie Welish, and Rae Armantrout among other Language writers.

Swensen's portfolio should be read in tandem with a very valuable book published this year, Serge Gavronsky's *Towards a New Poetics: Contemporary Writing in France* (University of California Press, 1994, $18 paper). Gavronsky's introduction is very informative about the evolution of post-World War II poetry in France, from the "literature engagée" of the fifties and sixties to *Tel Quel* Marxist poetics and the deconstructionist

climate of the "death of the author" that dominated the literary scene through the late seventies. He is somewhat less successful in explaining the aesthetic of the current moment, remarking, for example, that the "reactivation of the first-person singular [is] now no longer a mere grammatical unit as it was in the sixties." Since the poetry in question (especially Jacques Roubaud's *Oulipo* work) takes pains to avoid the personal, it isn't quite clear what the shift away from *Tel Quel* means for poetry. I am also a bit confused about the the relation of the "formalism" he rightly ascribes to the "new poets" to their wholesale refusal of versification.

Never mind. The interviews Gavronsky conducts with his twelve writers (both poets and novelists) are full of fascinating material and the translations of the poems are excellent. I was especially interested in Michel Deguy's discussion of the disappearance of genres in favor of "poetical works" that cannot be readily classified and in Emmanuel Hocquard's insistence that he is "allergic to everything metaphoric, even to metaphor itself." Jacqueline Risset talks movingly about *passage* experience and what she calls "language cells." And Jacques Roubaud, one of the greatest writers represented here, reminds us how complex the derivation of his own poetry is, stemming, as it does, from the Troubadours as well as from Wittgenstein and Gertrude Stein.

At one point, Gavronsky asks Roubaud (who teaches mathematics at Paris-Nanterre) about the relation of academic to creative life in France. Roubaud answers:

> To tell the truth, there's an unreachable barrier in France between academic and creative life, and it's been that way for a long time. That's how it was in the sixteenth century, and nothing has changed!. . . .That doesn't mean that in France there isn't a strong interest in poetry among students and younger members of the faculty. But these are parallel lives; they do not cross.

Sound familiar? I'm amused to see that Roubaud thinks it's different in the U.S.! True, modern (and even postmodern) poetry is more fully "taught" in our universities than in French ones but the "parallel lives" Roubaud refers to are surely ours as well. Still, it's comforting to know the "barrier" has always been there and, in any case, there is now, both here and in France, enough interesting poeticizing, bookmaking, art working and theorizing going on to keep all of us busy. The U. of California Press should be commended for taking on what is, by current lights, bound to be a "marginal" project: an anthology of difficult new French poetry and poetics.

—MARJORIE PERLOFF

Footnotes

1 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Letters to Ernst Jandl," *Chapman:* Ian Hamilton Finlay Special Issue, ed. Alec Finlay, 78-79 (1994): 11-12.

2 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Letters*, ed. Alan Bold (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 703.

3 They are available from Morning Star Publications, 17 Gladstone Terrace (ground floor), Edinburgh EH 9 1LS, Scotland for £20 per series, or through Small Press Distribution, Berkeley.

4 The CD is disappointing, there being no explanation of the eclectic mix of poets represented, many of whom (e.g., Alice Notley, Kenward Elmslie) are not in the book at all and some, like the Jack Spicer "Imaginary Elegies" (1957), and John Ashbery's "'They Dream Only of America'" (1962), stem from earlier decades. One could argue that the aim here, as in the book, is to produce telling juxtapositions, but in practice, the sequence from Michael Palmer to Ted Berrigan creates more confusion than insight.

5 Ming-Quian Ma, a Chinese doctoral candidate at Stanford, who has published essays on Carl Rakosi, George Oppen, Susan Howe, and Lyn Hejinian, and who is working on further translations of the "Original" poets with Jeff Twitchell, tells me that in the original, the poems in question are much more non-syntactic and disjunctive than in these translations. But of course I can only take Ma's word for it here.

Contributor Notes

MILTON KESSLER is working on a libretto for a chamber opera on Walt Whitman with the composer T.J. Anderson. *Learning the Boxes,* which originally appeared in *Sulfur* #31, is now available from Black Bird Press (with etchings by Robert E. Marx). ANNE WALDMAN is the author of *Iovis* and *Kill or Cure;* she coedited *Disembodied Poetics, Annals of the Jack Kerouac School,* with Andrew Schelling. She is the Director of the Writing Program at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, ROBERTO TEJADA has recently published articles and reviews in *Arte Internacional, La jornada, Themes,* and *The VVLS.* He continues to edit *Mandorla: New Writing from the Americas* out of Mexico City, MICHAEL HOLMAN lives in Ft. Wayne, Indiana; he has recently published poems in *Poetry East* and *The Burning World.* JAMES CLIFFORD is completing *Routes,* essays on the politics and poetics of location. Beginning in the fall of 1996, Coffee House Press will publish, in serial fashion, the complete collected works of PAUL METCALF. Exact Change has recently published CLAYTON ESHLEMAN's translation (with BERNARD BADOR: see cover, *Sulfur* #35) of ANTONIN ARTAUD's *Watchfiends & Rack Screams.* JEROME ROTHENBERG's twentieth-century anthology, *Poems for the Millennium* (coedited with Pierre Joris) has just been published by University of California Press. His tenth New Directions book, *Seedings,* will appear in 1996. MICHAEL MCCLURE's most recent publication is a collection of three long poems, *Dark Brown, Rare Angel,* and *Dolphin Skull* entitled *Three Poems* (Penguin-Viking). CHARLES WATTS is one of the organizers of "The Recovery of the Public World: a Conference and Poetry Festival in Honour of Robin Blaser, his Poetry and Poetics," which was held in June, 1995, in Vancouver, Canada. He works as a curator in the Simon Fraser University Library. PETER QUARTERMAIN is the author of *Disjunctive Poetics,* and has just finished writing the introduction to Kathleen Fraser's forthcoming *Collected Poems* (National Poetry Foundation). JACKSON MAC LOW'S books include *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (Roof), and *Pieces O'Six* (Sun & Moon). BRIAN D LUCAS lives in San Francisco and has published two small books, *Egg* and *Put.* He thanks Clark Coolidge, "a gem-encrusted drumset for him," Sections from RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS' Drafts are currently appearing in *Common*

Knowledge, Grand Street, Hambone, and *West Coast Line.* The next book of *Drafts* is expected in 1996. The Argentine writer LUISA FUTORANSKY has lived in Paris since 1982; she has published eight books of poetry, three novels, and two nonfiction works. JEFFERSON HANSON recently moved to Minneapolis, where he continues to edit *Poetic Briefs* magazine; his latest chapbook is *The Dramatic Monologues of Joe Blow* Only Artsy (Texture). JASON WEISS is finishing his first novel; his translation of Marcel Cohen's *Mirrors* will be published in 1996 by Sun & Moon. PHILLIP FOSS's most recent book are: *Courtesan of Seizure, The Excesses The Caprices,* and *The Composition of Glass.* DEAN YOUNG's new book, *Strike Anywhere,* won the Colorado Prize and will be published in October. PETER REDGROVE has recently coauthored *Alchemy For Women* (Rider, England) with Penelope Shuttle. The archetypal psychologist WOLFGANG GIEGERICH's writing has appeared in *Sulfurs*#20, 21, 28 and 30. In the fall PAMELA WYE will exhibit work in a international drawing show in Budapest, and in a group show at Elga Wimmer Gallery, NYC. DOREN ROBBINS' poetry and commentary have appeared in many magazines, including *North Dakota Quarterly, Kayak, Sulfur, American Poetry Review, Sagetreib, Contact II* and *Third Rail.* LINDSAY HILL's most recent book is *Kill Series* (Arundel). His newly completed book-length manuscript is entitled *NdjenFerno.* KEITH TUMA is lately pondering the post-Cartesian maxim "The limits of my language are the limits of my turd." ELIOT WEINBERGER 's *Written Reaction: Poetics Politics Polemics* is forthcoming from Marsilio. JEFF TWITCHELL writes on modern poetry and translates China experimentalists. He is now in Taiwan. ALLEN S. WEISS is most recently author of *Phantasmic Radio* (Duke). MARJORIE PERLOFF's recent books include *John Cage: Composed in America* (editor) and *Radical Artifice.*

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